

**SPRINGS MILLS BUILDING**, 104 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 102-106 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street, 107-115 West 39<sup>th</sup> Street), Manhattan

Built 1961-63; Harrison & Abramovitz, architects, Charles H. Abbe, chief designer

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 815, Lot 21

On November 17, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Springs Mills Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with provisions of law. Four people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the owner, New York State Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried, the Historic Districts Council, and Docomomo New York/Tri-State.

### Summary

The Springs Mills Building is a 21-story office tower located in midtown Manhattan on a mid-block site, close to Bryant Park and just south of Times Square. Constructed in 1961-63 for a leading American textile manufacturer, it rises from an irregular L-shaped lot that connects West 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Streets. At the time of construction, many businesses associated with the textile industry were migrating from lower Manhattan to the Garment District. Springs Cotton Mills was founded in 1914, when Leroy Springs assumed control of the Fort Mill Manufacturing Company. A New York sales office was established by 1946 and in subsequent years the company became the largest producer of sheets and pillow cases in the United States. Harrison & Abramovitz, who designed many notable buildings following the Second World War, served as architect. Though Max Abramovitz was the partner in charge of the project, it was mostly designed by Charles H. Abbe. The scheme that the architects devised during 1961 took into account anticipated changes to the New York City zoning code. As the last year in which the 1916 code remained in effect, on 39<sup>th</sup> Street the base fills the entire lot and incorporates two horizontal setbacks. In contrast, the 40<sup>th</sup>



Street facade was designed to create the appearance of a slab-like, free-standing tower that rises from a shallow landscaped plaza. Inspired by Abbe's recent experience working on the Corning Glass Building on Fifth Avenue, the sleek elevations feature a well-proportioned grid of deep green "Solex" glass panels and aluminum mullions. Both dark grey and silver, these slim mullions were deliberately arranged to enhance the building's verticality. The hexagonal tower, on the other hand, was shaped by practical and artistic considerations: not only did the elongated configuration allow sunlight to reach what would have normally been lot-line windows on the upper floors, but this unusual massing gives the structure a unique and distinctive identity. The Springs Mills Building was completed in early 1963, marking the company's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Like numerous structures erected in Manhattan by major corporations during this period, many floors were occupied by outside tenants, including a large number in the textile industry. Sold by Springs Industries in 1999, its successor firm, Springs Global, remains a significant tenant. The Springs Mills Building is a well-preserved example of a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century glass curtain wall skyscraper and one of the finest corporate works designed by Harrison & Abramovitz in New York City.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Harrison & Abramovitz

Wallace K. Harrison (1895-1981) and Max Abramovitz (1908-2004) met in New York City in 1931. At the time, Harrison was working with J. Andre Fouilhoux and the Associated Architects on the design of Rockefeller Center (begun 1931, a designated New York City Landmark). Abramovitz, who would later be the partner in charge of the Springs Mills commission, joined their team in 1935. Born in Chicago, he attended the University of Chicago and Columbia University. After two years at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, he returned to New York City in 1934 to commence his long-term collaboration with Harrison. Following Fouilhoux's death in 1945, the firm became known as Harrison & Abramovitz. Their partnership lasted until 1976, when Harrison left the office and Abramovitz, Harris & Kingsland was established. The firm is currently called Abramovitz, Kingsland & Schiff.

Harrison & Abramovitz were involved in some of the best-known architectural projects of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, including several pavilions at both New York World's Fairs (1939-40, 1964), the United Nations Headquarters (1947-52), and the Empire State Plaza in Albany (1967-71). They shared a gift for working with prominent clients and executing large projects – buildings or ensembles that sometimes required years to complete. Though Harrison was better known, they were partners and Abramovitz was often singled out for credit. For instance, they contributed independent designs to Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts: Harrison worked on the Metropolitan Opera House (1962-1966), and Abramovitz, Philharmonic (now Avery Fisher) Hall (1959-62). Corning Glass was also an important client and each partner oversaw structures erected on the company's upstate campus in the 1950s. Harrison headed the team that designed the 28-story Corning Glass Building (1956-59) at 717 Fifth Avenue. Located at the southeast corner of 56<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, this green glass tower certainly had an impact on the Springs Mills Building, for which, Abramovitz would be responsible.<sup>1</sup>

### Springs Mills

When plans for the building were made public in November 1961, Springs Mills was the largest producer of sheets and pillow cases in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Based in South Carolina, the corporate headquarters was located at Fort Mill, where the company's earliest plant was established by Samuel E. White in 1887. Twelve years later, White's son-in-law, Leroy Springs, founded an even larger mill in Lancaster, South Carolina. Both plants came under his control in 1914, and by 1919 he operated five separate mills as independent companies.

Under his son, Elliot W. Springs (1896-1959), the company prospered and became known as Springs Cotton Mills in 1934. Though sales declined in the Depression years, the company benefited greatly from military contracts during the Second World War and when the conflict ended it was poised for expansion. In subsequent years, the company built new plants and opened a Manhattan sales office, known as Springs Mills, Inc., at 200 Church Street (part of the Tribeca North Historic District). Acquired in October 1945, the 175-by-50 foot structure was located between Duane and Thomas Streets. Just one block south of Worth Street, this location was in the heart of the textile district, a section of Tribeca where dozens of firms had operated since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup>

H. William Close (1919-83), Elliot Springs' son-in-law, was elected president of Springs Cotton Mills and Springs Mills, Inc. in late 1959. Under his energetic leadership, many new plants were constructed and sales increased dramatically. In recognition of his achievements, he was named Textile Man of the Year by the New York Board of Trade – the same year that the Springs Mills Building was completed.<sup>4</sup> It was a prosperous time for the American textile industry and in subsequent years the company would diversify, producing towels, carpeting, and related products. In October 1966, Springs Mills was listed on the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>5</sup> It was renamed Springs Industries in the 1980s and is presently called Springs Global, with 41 plants operating in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Close's promotion coincided with the departure of many textile firms from lower Manhattan. A significant group moved to new office buildings in midtown, just north of the Garment District, near

Times Square. So many firms, in fact, were now based here that real estate agents promoted the area as “Worth Street North.” The *New York Times* reported:

The shift of many textile concerns uptown was attributable to the fact that the milling companies no longer needed storage space . . . for spot deliveries of their wares. Deliveries are now made directly from the mills to the department stores and other wholesale buyers. Out of town buyers prefer to do all of their business in the midtown area rather than contend with the inconvenience of travelling downtown.<sup>6</sup>

The textile firm Lowenstein & Sons, for instance, commissioned a 22-story building at 1430 Broadway (1953-56), between West 39<sup>th</sup> Street and 40<sup>th</sup> Street, and Deering Milliken & Co. erected a 7-story structure (Carson & Lundin, 1958, demolished) at 1045 Sixth Avenue, adjoining the future site of the Springs Mills Building at the northwest corner of 39<sup>th</sup> Street. While the latter building was planned for the company’s exclusive use, 1430 Broadway would only be partly occupied by Lowenstein, which decided to sell the structure in 1955 and sublease six floors.

In January 1960, the developers Aaron Rabinowitz and Arnold T. Milton (aka Cardiff Corporation) announced plans to erect a 19-story commercial building at 104-6 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street and 107-13 West 39<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>7</sup> These parcels were occupied by five buildings, the largest of which was the former Maxine Elliott Theatre (Marshall & Fox), facing 39<sup>th</sup> Street. Built in 1908, this intimate neo-Classical-style playhouse was leased to the Federal Theatre Project of the Works Progress Administration in the mid-1930s, and later, the Columbia Broadcasting Company.<sup>8</sup> Emery Roth & Sons was chosen as the new building’s architect, with the anticipated time of completion in autumn 1961. In December 1960, however, Springs Mills purchased the site. At the time, it already had a women’s wear division at 1457 Broadway. Two months later, in February 1962, a small parcel was added through a long-term lease of a one-story structure at 102 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street. Measuring 22 by 24 feet, this modest acquisition would be used to widen the plaza to the east.<sup>9</sup>

### Designing the Springs Mills Building

Harrison & Abramovitz were selected as the architects in late 1960 or early 1961. The firm’s office was currently located in the International Building at 630 Fifth Avenue in Rockefeller Center. It was one of the larger and more prestigious firms in New York City, with approximately 40 architects on staff. Though Abramovitz would be the partner in charge of the project, it was mostly designed by Charles H. Abbe (1909-1993).<sup>10</sup> A graduate of Harvard University and New York University, during the 1930s Abbe was associated with William Lescaze, who helped introduce the aesthetics of European modernism in the United States, and later, with his former partner George Howe. Abbe joined Harrison & Abramovitz around 1946 and later designed the Corning Glass Building (1956-59); the Educational Testing Labs (1958) at Princeton, New Jersey; the main terminal at LaGuardia Airport (1964) in Queens, New York; the US Steel Building (1971, now USX Tower) in Pittsburgh; and the United Nations International School (1972-73) in Manhattan.

The design of the Springs Mills Building was determined by several factors: the mid-block site, current architectural taste, and anticipated changes to the New York City zoning code. The L-shaped parcel was large but irregular, connecting West 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Streets. Not only did it offer the potential for a through-block corridor – a popular amenity in the densely-packed Garment District, but the site adjoined several structures of unusually modest height, promising tenants impressive views and natural light. A six-story commercial building stood directly west, at 108 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street. This unassuming structure was controlled by its immediate neighbor, the 25-story World’s Tower (Buchman & Fox, 1913). And, more importantly, to the east were two recently-constructed buildings: the seven-story Deering Milliken Company Building and 1057 Sixth Avenue, a six-story brick structure (David Kraus, 1954-56). Though no part of the site was actually on Sixth Avenue (aka the Avenue of the Americas), the Springs Mills Building would have great visibility, especially from Bryant Park.

The upper stories have a distinctive shape that resembles an elongated hexagon. Considerably longer than deep, the tower swells slightly near the center of the block. Like the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier and the Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen, Harrison & Abramovitz frequently employed a sculptural aesthetic in their work, from the Theme Center (aka the Trylon & Perisphere, 1937-39) at the New York World's Fair to the Empire State Plaza, where the ovoid shape of the reinforced concrete performing arts center (1966-78) is often compared to an egg. Offices buildings, however, presented a different type of challenge. Planned to meet to mainly functional needs, owners tended to favor standardized, rectilinear designs that maximized square footage. More innovative strategies were generally only pursued by the heads of major corporations, such as at Joseph E. Seagram & Sons and the Columbia Broadcasting System, who believed a more unique architectural image would generate positive public relations.

High-rise projects that may have influenced Abramovitz and Abbe's approach include: various unbuilt trapezoidal schemes developed by Le Corbusier for Algiers (1938) and the United Nations (1946), the hexagonal Pirelli Building (Gio Ponti, 1958-59) in Milan,<sup>11</sup> and the Pan Am Building (now the Metropolitan Life Building, Emery Roth & Sons, Walter Gropius and Pietro Belluschi, 1959-63), which was nearing completion and featured a concrete-faced tower with octagonal floors. Not only did such buildings contrast sharply with the ever-present Manhattan gridiron, but by wrapping the Springs Mills Building with a sleek surface of deep green glass and aluminum, the tower's appearance would change in response to varying light conditions.

### The Glass Curtain Wall

To give office and institutional structures a strong modern identity, Harrison & Abramovitz frequently used industrial materials, particularly colored glass and metal. Such techniques were introduced in Western Europe after the First World War, when Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe prepared visionary drawings of transparent towers rising in open space. Mies wrote in 1922:

We can see the new structural principles most clearly when we use glass in place of the outer walls, which is feasible today since in a skeleton building these outer walls do not actually carry weight.<sup>12</sup>

In designing the Bauhaus (1926) in Dessau, Germany, the school's director Walter Gropius made extensive use of this material, wrapping the rectangular facades with large expanses of glass. A masterpiece of early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, it was well-known by architects and critics and was highlighted in public exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art.

The first major office building with a glass curtain wall in New York City was the 39-story Secretariat at the headquarters of the United Nations (1947-52). Suspended in front of a building's steel frame, curtain walls support no weight. At the UN, for instance, the double-hung windows and grilles were located 27 inches in front of the perimeter columns.<sup>13</sup> Though Le Corbusier, a member of the Board of Design, felt strongly that brise-soleils or sunshades would best control the building's interior temperatures, Wallace Harrison commissioned several studies that justified the use of only green tinted Thermopane glass.<sup>14</sup> Introduced in the 1940s to reduce fuel consumption in homes, this type of double glazing was frequently employed to limit heat gain inside new office buildings.<sup>15</sup>

At Lever House (1950-52, a designated New York City Landmark), Skidmore Owings & Merrill developed this idea further. In contrast to the Secretariat, which has side walls of white marble, these elevations were entirely glazed with fixed panels, creating a simpler, more minimalist effect. With alternating bands of dark and tinted green glass, the "Soapmaker's washable new home" was described as the "world's glassiest."<sup>16</sup> Praised in the popular press and warmly received by the general public, Lever's gleaming green exterior would help corporate America develop a taste for modern architecture and design.

Construction of Harrison & Abramovitz's Corning Glass Building was completed in 1959. It was the first building on Fifth Avenue to have fully glazed elevations and it received an award from the Fifth

Avenue Association in 1960 as the street's best new commercial building. The skin was particularly innovative, layering translucent glass in front of painted metal panels to create depth and diminish the appearance of horizontal banding. In addition, the treatment of the mullions was new. Though earlier curtain walls had been assembled from disparate parts, for this project the aluminum mullions were manufactured to interlock, creating a fully integrated system of glass and substructure.<sup>17</sup>

At Springs Mills, Abbe adopted a similar system in which the dark grey and silver aluminum mullions form a well-proportioned grid over the entire facade. Each bay consists of four rectangular glass panels: two windows over two spandrels. As in the Corning Glass Building, the silver mullions project slightly and have a vertical orientation. Not only do they anchor the window washing equipment, but such elements were designed to give the smooth elevations an "elegant vertical direction."<sup>18</sup> The rest of the mullions are a dark grey color, almost black. Attached with visible screwed beading, they appear as interlocking. Within each bay, the windows are separated by a central vertical mullion that extends from the base of the spandrels to the top of the windows, which are crowned by a similar unbroken horizontal mullion. Below the windows, the mullions are divided into twin segments, abutting the central vertical mullion. Near the roof, at the penthouse level, a continuous band of grayish metal louvers disguise the mechanical equipment. Like the windows on the second and upper floors, these panels are slightly taller than the rest, enhancing the sense of vertical thrust.<sup>19</sup>

The Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company supplied the glass panels. Available in various colors and tints, "Solex" glass was developed in the 1950s to absorb heat, reduce eye strain, and diminish the sun-bleaching of fabrics. While the windows are almost clear and transparent, the spandrel panels are opaque and were presumably treated with a "ceramic frit color fused permanently to the indoor surface."<sup>20</sup> These dark panels disguise the floor plates and were probably backed by concrete blocks. Significantly more expensive than conventional glass, the manufacturer claimed:

Occupants of Solex-glazed interiors . . . are cooler and more comfortable than persons in rooms with ordinary glass. A room with Solex is usually 10 to 20 degrees cooler than a room with ordinary glass.<sup>21</sup>

Such materials, however, did not entirely eliminate the serious problem of heat gain and structures with glass curtain walls would always be planned with central air conditioning.

### The Base and Plaza

The Springs Mills Building has two street entrances, linked by an internal concourse. On West 39<sup>th</sup> Street, the base fills the entire lot, with horizontal setbacks above the sixth and twelfth floors. The ground story has two storefronts, set behind a row of four stainless steel-clad columns. Each column consists of two hexagonal sections that bear a resemblance to the building's tower. Like the side elevations, the outer face of each column is divided by a vertical line. The south end of the lobby is entered through an open passage (or breezeway) that recalls the 51<sup>st</sup> Street entrance to the Time & Life Building (Harrison, Abramovitz & Harris, 1956-60, a designated New York City Landmark Interior). The slightly sloped terrazzo ramp is flanked by walls of projecting stainless steel louvers. As built in 1963, the glass revolving doors at the north end were originally located outside the lobby and were topped by free-standing metal numerals (109 W. 39) that identified the address. In contrast, the West 40<sup>th</sup> Street entrance is located at the center of the ground story. Set within a wide, asymmetrical plaza, this facade's slender proportions counterbalance the 50-foot-wide front of the World's Tower, located one lot to the west.

The contrasting character of the north and south elevations was most likely shaped by impending changes to the New York City zoning ordinance. Since 1916, architects and developers had been encouraged to erect commercial buildings with setbacks, rising in tiers to the uppermost floors. In the 1950s, several important office buildings were erected with spacious plazas, for instance, the Seagram Building (Mies van der Rohe, 1956-58) and One Chase Manhattan Plaza (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1957-64, both designated New York City Landmarks). Though some interior space was sacrificed, these corporations felt they benefited because it enhanced "their building's appearance and the companies'

prestige.”<sup>22</sup> A much-revised zoning code was approved by the City Planning Commission in October 1960. Not only would the overall bulk of future buildings be reduced but through the use of incentives developers were encouraged to provide similar public spaces in their projects. Effective on December 15, 1961, in the months preceding this date a record number of new building permits was issued by the Department of Buildings, including one for the Springs Mills Building.<sup>23</sup>

Abramovitz and Abbe devised a plan that respected both planning strategies. The south facade conformed to the existing code and the north facade looked towards the future. While the base of the 39<sup>th</sup> Street facade fills the entire lot and incorporates setbacks, the 40<sup>th</sup> Street facade gives the impression of a free-standing tower. To set the plaza off from the street and its neighbors, the walls of the adjoining structures were faced with limestone panels and the paving was travertine, an Italian stone that the firm used throughout the Lincoln Center complex during the early 1960s. As the building’s primary entrance, capital letters were attached to the east and west walls that identified Springs Mills as the main tenant and owner. In addition, a metal display case was installed on the west wall to promote the company’s products.

The plaza was envisioned as open and minimal, with few distractions. During the design process the number of entrances was reduced to one, and the revolving glass doors were moved inside the lobby. In addition, the various planting beds were deliberately kept low and only miniature trees, shrubs, and rocks were used. There were originally two 20-inch-square tree planters on the east side, as well as an L-shaped plant box, trimmed with polished black granite, bordering the east and north-east walls. To either side of the entrance, extending south, were twin trapezoidal plant boxes. While early views through the west window of the north lobby indicate that the west planting box originally contained low shrubs, later photographs, from the 1970s or possibly earlier, show tall bronze screens with open circular patterns had been installed, separating these modest gardens from the front of the plaza. The east screen remains, as well as a Japanese-style rock garden, which probably dates from the 1960s.<sup>24</sup>

### Construction

Harrison & Abramovitz filed plans to erect the Springs Mills Building in mid-1961 (NB 136-61). The *New York Times* described the proposed structure as having a facade of metal and glass, as well as more than 160,000 square feet of rentable office space. With the site under excavation by November 1961, the anticipated date of completion was late 1962.<sup>25</sup>

The George A. Fuller Company, one of the most successful builders in the United States, was selected as general contractor. Established in Chicago in 1882, it specialized in steel frame construction and frequently collaborated with Harrison & Abramovitz, erecting the Alcoa Building (1953) in Pittsburgh, United Nations Headquarters, Corning Glass Building, Time-Life Building, and Empire State Plaza in Albany. The mid-block construction site, according to the *New York Times*, posed a significant challenge to the builder. It lacked adequate unloading space on both streets and Fuller developed “imaginative logistics” to avoid interrupting pedestrian activity and truck traffic, including the lifting of materials to “the exact place in the building where they will be used.”<sup>26</sup>

The steel framework was finished by August 1962 and the building was ready for occupancy in February 1963. It was the company’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and a ten-day celebration and “open house” was held in New York City, with a visiting delegation from the home office in Fort Mill, South Carolina. In addition, a traveling art and photography exhibition was organized, as well as a fashion show. According to Springs Mills, these events “received excellent coverage in the media.”<sup>27</sup>

### Subsequent History

Springs Mills occupied four floors (about 45,000 square feet) in the building and the rest of the structure – approximately 75 per cent – was leased to other textile firms. Among these firms, several early tenants also moved from Worth Street, including the Joshua L. Baily Company, Inc., selling agents; Lebanon Woolen Mills, Inc., manufacturers of synthetic fiber blankets; Minot-Hooper, Inc., cotton goods; and the Muscogee Manufacturing Company, towels and other fabrics, a unit of Fieldcrest Mills. In 1964,

the Beacon Manufacturing Company, a major blanket manufacturer, began leasing the 39<sup>th</sup> Street store and concourse space as a sales headquarters.<sup>28</sup>

Springs Industries sold the building to RFR Realty in August 1999. The current owners are Principal Real Estate Investors, based in Des Moines, Iowa, and Mermel & McMMain Management. It is currently called 104 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Springs Industries remains the largest tenant. Prior to 2009, four waist-high concrete planting beds were added to the east side of the 40<sup>th</sup> Street plaza, as well as, to the west of the lobby, a slightly modified planting box.

### Description

The 21-story Springs Mills Building is located on West 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Streets, between Sixth Avenue and Broadway in Manhattan. While the upper (13<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>) floors are hexagonal, the base (1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> floors) and middle (7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>) floors have various configurations that respond to the 1916 zoning code, as well as the irregular shape of the site. The skin consists of green-tinted glass and dark grey (or black) and silver aluminum mullions. The silver mullions emphasize the appearance of continuous vertical ascent, while the dark grey mullions frame the transparent windows. Each of the floors is identical height, except the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> stories, which are slightly taller.

On 39<sup>th</sup> Street, the base fills the entire 100-foot-long lot, setting back above the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, and again, on the west side of the building, above the 12<sup>th</sup> floor. The ground floor is recessed behind an arcade of free-standing stainless steel-clad pillars that, in terms of shape, resemble the hexagonal tower. Like the north and south tower facades, the outer face of each pillar has a center line. To the right (east) of the entrance is a small glazed storefront trimmed with aluminum, and to the left (west), a larger glazed storefront, a loading dock with a roll-down aluminum door, and at the far end, a dark gray metal service entrance. At the east end of the arcade, running north-south, the wall is brick, painted white.

The walls of the entrance passage, as well as an area directly to the right, are faced with aluminum louvers. Terrazzo blocks pave the ramp which leads to the lobby through revolving glass-and-metal doors, flanked by conventional doors with vertical metal handles. Above the doors is a large fixed horizontal glass transom. The left and right edges are trimmed with brown and white marble that extends into and through the lobby. The ceiling is clad with rectangular aluminum panels that incorporate a single row of recessed lights in the arcade, and four rows of lights in the entrance passage.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Street (north) entrance is located inside an L-shaped plaza. In contrast to the 39<sup>th</sup> Street entrance, the revolving doors are recessed and located within the lobby. The large panels that flank the entrance are clear transparent glass, in contrast to the green tint of the slender vertical panels that mark the corners.

To mask the structures that adjoin the plaza, the east, southeast, east (facing the lobby) and west walls are faced with limestone blocks. Near the top of each wall is an evenly-spaced row of rounded metal down lights, which are original or resemble the original fixtures. On the east side of the plaza is a group of four raised, non-historic concrete planting beds. A non-historic metal frame is attached to the west wall, replacing or disguising the original display case.

On either side of the 40<sup>th</sup> Street entrance are low rectangular planting beds that extend south, beginning near the north edge of the tower. The east garden originates behind the side (east) exit door and adjoins the lobby, terminating where a single bay of the mid-section of the building extends eastward. Decorated with rocks of varying size, it is visible through a tall, two-part metal screen with gridded panels that dates to the 1960s. The west garden also adjoins the lobby, terminating where a single bay of the mid-section of the building extends west. Four bays deep, it, too, is set behind a side (west) exit door incorporating a vertical handle on the left side. The low concrete planting bed is not original and is currently planted with short bushes.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See “Max Abramovitz: List of Buildings” in Victoria Newhouse, *Wallace K. Harrison, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli Books, 1989), 323; John Harwood and Janet Parks, *The Troubled Search: The Work of Max Abramovitz* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery at Columbia University, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> “Building Planned by Springs Mills,” *New York Times*, November 20, 1961, 53.

<sup>3</sup> “Buys on Church Street,” *New York Times*, October 20, 1945, 26; also see “194-206 Church Street” in Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Tribeca South Historic District Report* (LP-1712) (New York: City of New York, 1992), 42.

<sup>4</sup> “Legacy of Leadership,” last viewed at [www.knowitall.org](http://www.knowitall.org)

<sup>5</sup> Abramovitz also prepared designs for a new Springs Mills headquarters in Lancaster, South Carolina in 1966. This unexecuted project in some ways resembles the building that houses the New York State Museum (1976) in Albany. A photo of the model is part of the Max Abramovitz Collection at Avery Library, Columbia University. “Spring Mills Stock Sold To Public for First Time,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1966, 62.

<sup>6</sup> “Avenue of Americas Benefits From Influx of Textile Firms,” *New York Times*, March 4, 1956, R1; “Textile Area Due For A New Cycle,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1957, R1.

<sup>7</sup> “W. 40<sup>th</sup> St. Plans Office Structure,” *New York Times*, January 18, 1960, 42; “40<sup>th</sup> Street Plot Acquired for a Textile Building,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1960.

<sup>8</sup> See “CBS Studio No. 51,” last viewed at [www.ibdb.com](http://www.ibdb.com) (2010).

<sup>9</sup> See records of the Office of the Surveyor (Block 815, Lot 35), lease, February 5, 1962 and “Building Site Enlarged,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1962, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Though Newhouse lists this project as being among Abramovitz’s works, two former colleagues at Harrison & Abramovitz, Victoria Lyons and Jerry Schiff, independently credited Abbe. Conversations with author, January 2010.

<sup>11</sup> In May 1959, Ada Louise Huxtable listed the unorthodox Pirelli Building among “Ten Buildings That Say Today” in the *New York Times*, May 24, 1959, sm32. This tower was designed by the Italian architect-designer Gio Ponti, who was currently working with Harrison & Abramovitz & Harris on a series of meeting rooms for the Time & Life Building (1956-59).

<sup>12</sup> Mies, quoted by Scott Murray in *Contemporary Curtain Wall Architect* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 26, viewed at [Googlebooks.com](http://Googlebooks.com).

<sup>13</sup> *Langmead Encyclopedia of Architectural and Engineering Feats* (2001), 87, viewed at [Googlebooks.com](http://Googlebooks.com).

<sup>14</sup> Newhouse, 127-28.

<sup>15</sup> “Windows Insulated By 2 Sealed Panels,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1944, RE1.

<sup>16</sup> “Shiny New Sight,” *Life* (June 2, 1952), viewed at [Googlebooks.com](http://Googlebooks.com)

<sup>17</sup> For a description of the curtain wall at Corning Glass, see Newhouse, 154, fn 15, 304. This technique, however, does not appear to be used on all of this building’s facades. Also, see Scott Murray, 39-40.

<sup>18</sup> “The Big Mirror,” *Architectural Forum* (May 1959), 116. Rolf Schaal wrote that Corning Glass had a “decided vertical emphasis due to the projection of one vertical member in each frame to form a guide wall for the window cleaning rig.” See Rolf Schaal, *Curtain Walls: Design Manual* (New York: Reinhold Publishing, 1962), 160.

<sup>19</sup> In subsequent decades, architects continued to employ glazed curtain walls. Notable structures in Manhattan that feature green glazing include: 1 & 2 United Nations Plaza (Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo & Associates, 1976 and 1983), the Home Box Office Building (1100 Sixth Avenue, 1978), Park Avenue Plaza (SOM, 1981), Tower 49 (SOM, 1985), and the CIT Building (Harrison & Abramovitz, 1957, Fox & Fowle, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> Advertisement for Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, *Architectural Forum* (March 1963), insert.

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<sup>21</sup> “Sun-Defying Glass Is Shown Here; It Passes More Light but Less Heat,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1951, 61; “Glass Reduces Glare,” *New York Times*, March 9, 1952, F9.

<sup>22</sup> “Skyscraper Owners Give Up Floor Area for Open Plazas,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1960, R1.

<sup>23</sup> “New Offices Rise At A Record Rate,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1963, R1.

<sup>24</sup> It has been suggested by landscape architect Michael Gotkin that the rock garden was designed by David H. Engel (b. 1922), who frequently used Japanese aesthetics in his work. According to architect Jerry Schiff, a colleague of Abramovitz, the firm used two landscape designers during this period, Dan Kiley and Engel. Engel, however, did not recall working on the plaza in 2010 and suggested to the author that it was designed by his partner Dennis Piermont. The bronze screen outside the west garden was removed in the mid-2000s and the planting box has been altered.

<sup>25</sup> “Building Planned by Springs Mills,” *New York Times*, November 20, 1961, 53; “Building Site Enlarged,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1962, 41.

<sup>26</sup> “Building Work Needs Logistics,” *New York Times*, November 18, 1962, R1.

<sup>27</sup> Louise Pettus and Martha Bishop, *The Springs Story: Our First One Hundred Years* (Springs Industries, 1987), 178, 180.

<sup>28</sup> “10 Leases Made in New Building: Textiles Companies Take Space in 104 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street,” *New York Times*, December 5, 1963, 92; “Other Building Leases,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1964; “Textile Concern to Move,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1964, 60; “Space for Blanket Maker,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1965, 50.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Springs Mills 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 Springs Mills Building, located on an irregular L-shaped midblock site in Manhattan, near Bryant Park and south of Times Square, was constructed for a leading American textile manufacturer in 1961-63; that Springs Cotton Mills was founded in 1914, when Leroy Springs assumed control of the Fort Mill Manufacturing Company and is currently called Springs Global; that a New York sales office was first established at 200 Church Street in 1946; that this sleek mid-20<sup>th</sup> century modern structure was designed by the prominent New York City architects Harrison & Abramovitz; that Charles H. Abbe served as lead designer; that he faced the 21-story building with a deep green glass and aluminum mullion curtain wall that drew on his recent experience as the designer of the Corning Glass Building at 717 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan; that the dark grey and silver mullions used on both buildings were deliberately arranged to enhance the tower's verticality; that the Springs Mills Building was designed during the last months that the 1916 zoning code remained in effect and has two distinct facades and entrances; that the lower floors of the 39<sup>th</sup> Street elevations occupy the entire lot and have two horizontal setbacks and that the 40<sup>th</sup> Street facade has the appearance of a free-standing tower that stands within a shallow landscaped public plaza; that the form of the tower was shaped by practical and aesthetic considerations; that the elongated hexagonal profile allowed daylight to reach what would normally be lot-line windows and that the distinctive sculptural massing gives the building a unique identity on the skyline; that it was completed at the time of the company's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary; that like many office buildings constructed for major corporations in New York City it was built on speculation and many of the floors were leased to outside tenants, including a large number who were involved in the textile industry; that it is a particularly well-preserved example of a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century glass curtain wall skyscraper; and that it ranks among the finest corporate works designed by Harrison & Abramovitz in New York City.

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 Springs Mills Building, 104 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 102-106 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street, 107-115 West 39<sup>th</sup> Street), Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 815, Lot 21, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair

Frederick Bland, Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore,  
Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Springs Mills Building  
104 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 102-106 West 40<sup>th</sup> Street, 107-15 West 39<sup>th</sup> Street)  
Borough of Manhattan Block 815, Lot 21  
East facade, view from Sixth Avenue  
*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009*



Springs Mills Building  
40<sup>th</sup> Street and west facades, view to southeast  
*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009*



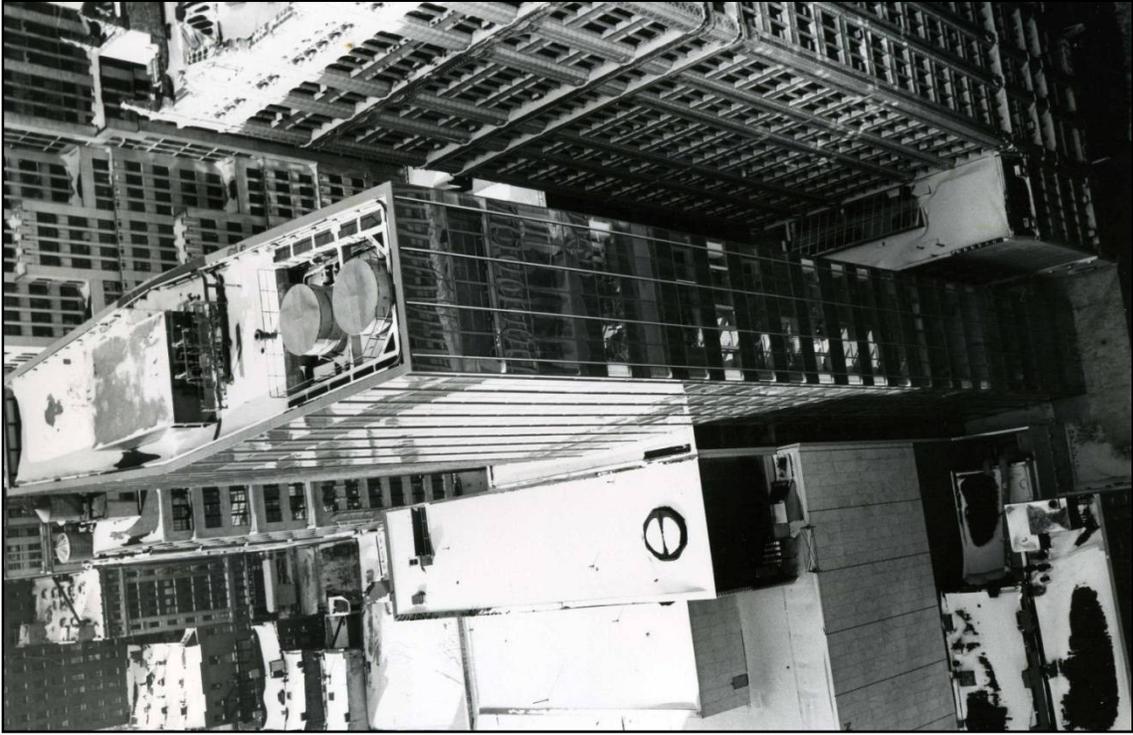
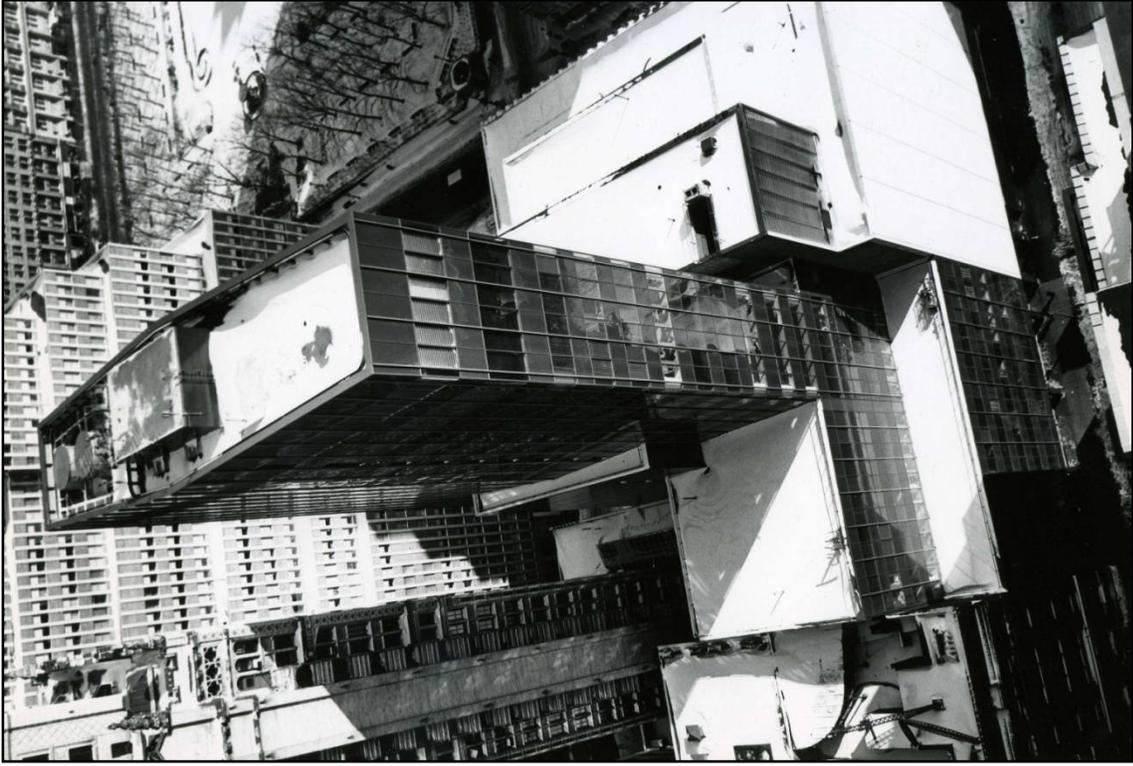
Springs Mills Building  
40<sup>th</sup> Street plaza and first story  
*Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009*



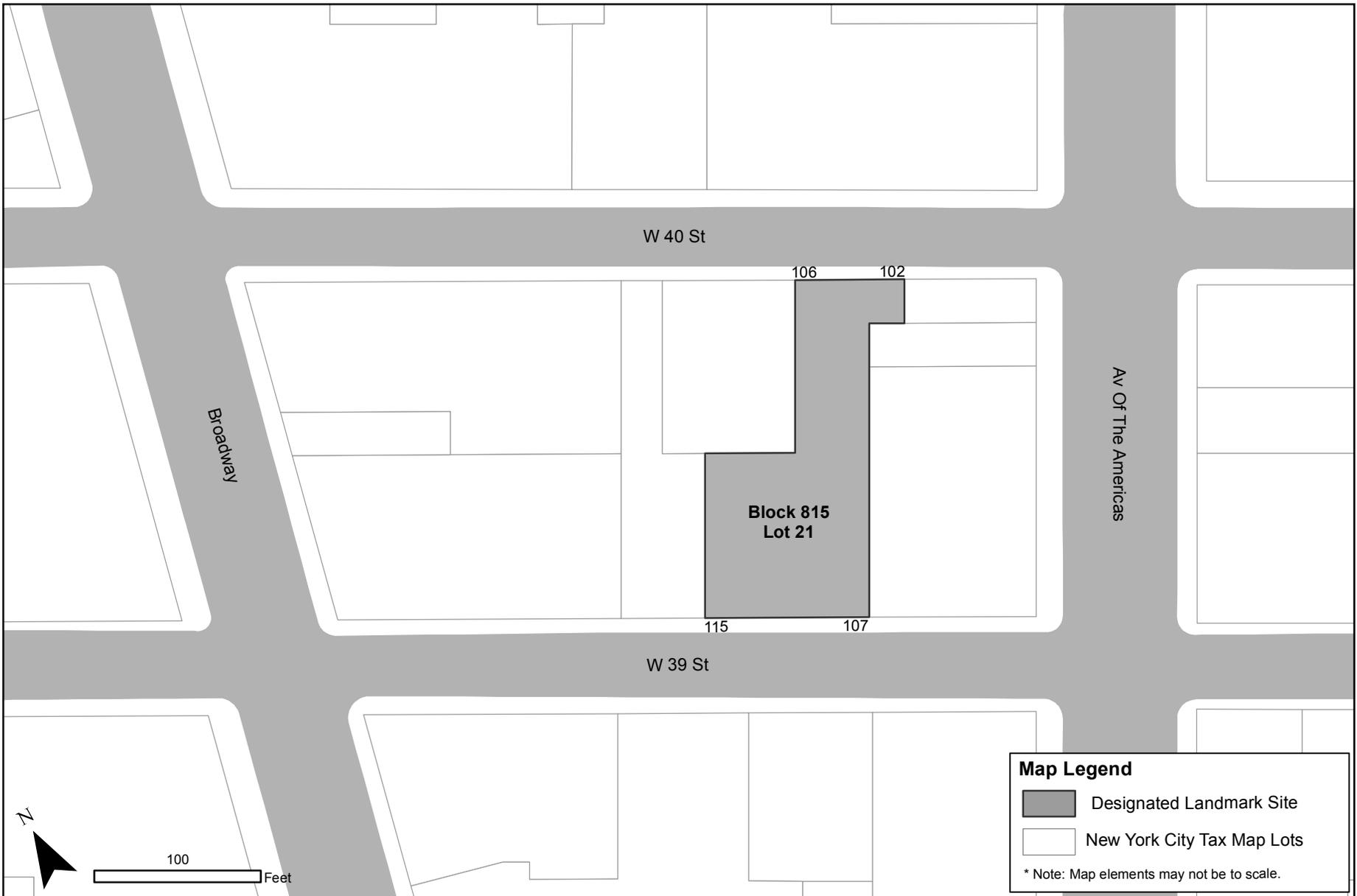
Springs Mills Building  
40<sup>th</sup> Street plaza  
*Photo: Joseph W. Molitor, c.1963*  
*Courtesy Abramovitz, Kingsland & Schiff*



Springs Mills Building  
39<sup>th</sup> Street facade; first story arcade with breezeway  
*Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2009*



Springs Mills Building  
Aerial views, to south and north  
Photos: Joseph W. Molitor, c.1963  
Courtesy: Abramovitz, Kingsland & Schiff



SPRINGS MILLS BUILDING (LP-2385), 104 West 40th Street (aka 102-106 West 40th Street and 107-115 West 39th Street).  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 815, Lot 20.

Designated: April 13, 2010