

Empire State Dairy Company Buildings



DESIGNATION REPORT

Empire State Dairy Company Buildings

LOCATION

Borough of Brooklyn

2840 Atlantic Avenue (aka 2840-2844

Atlantic Avenue; 181-185 Schenck Avenue)

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

A former dairy production facility consisting of buildings, designed by Theobald Engelhardt, from 1906-07 featuring detailing from the Renaissance and Romanesque Revival styles, as well as structures by Otto Strack from 1914-15 that display elements derived from Abstract Classicism and Secessionism.



Empire State Dairy Company Buildings
Sarah Moses (LPC), November 2017



Empire State Dairy Company Buildings

2840 Atlantic Avenue (aka 2840-2844 Atlantic Avenue; 181-185 Schenck Avenue), Brooklyn

Designation List 503 LP-2575

Built: 1906-07; 1914-15

Architect: Theobald Engelhardt; Otto Strack

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 3964, Lot 8 in part, including the six structures forming the Atlantic Avenue frontage of the complex in the northern portion of the lot between Schenck Avenue and Barbey Street, extending from the Atlantic Avenue facades south to include the rear facades of these three-story buildings, and the land beneath them, exclusive of the one-story shed and structures beyond it in the southern portion of the lot.

On July 19, 2016, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Empire State Dairy Company Buildings and the proposed designation of the related Landmark site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Five people testified in favor of designation, including representatives of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Historic Districts Council, Preserve East New York, and the Friends of Terra Cotta. A representative of the owner requested that the hearing be continued at a later date in order to complete an assessment of environmental conditions on the site and potential remediation requirements. The public hearing was continued on

September 13, 2016 (Item No. 2). Three people testified in favor of the designation, including representatives of Preserving East New York and the Historic Districts Council, and one individual. Representatives of the owner testified regarding the physical condition of the buildings and the presence of underground contamination and asked that the landmark site be modified to exclude the portion of the building affected by the contamination (“Building 5”). The Commission also received written testimony in favor of designation from Councilmember Rafael L. Espinal, Jr., and from three private individuals, as well as letters in support from the Tile Heritage Foundation, the Tiles and Architectural Ceramics Foundation, and a private individual; and a subsequent letter from the owner supporting designation and asking the Commission to recognize the challenges posed by required remediation.

Summary

The Empire State Dairy Company Buildings

The Empire State Dairy Company Buildings are significant industrial buildings in East New York. Consisting of a prominent ensemble of six late-19th and early-20th century industrial buildings, they form an entire block-front on Atlantic Avenue between Schenck Avenue and Barbey Street. They represent the changing tastes in industrial building design around the turn of the 20th century and the manufacturing history of the neighborhood, and showcase a significant development in the milk industry, which was making great strides in quality and safety at the time these buildings were constructed.

The earliest buildings in the ensemble, designed by Theobald Engelhardt and constructed in 1906-1907, are Renaissance/Romanesque Revival style buildings with unique terra-cotta details. These details include a decorative bay along Schenck Avenue as well as a series of tympani along the second-floor windows. Both the terra-cotta bay and tympani feature stylized keystones, brackets and flora details.

The 1914-15 annex, which may incorporate sections of earlier buildings on the site, was designed by Otto Strack, and also has unique features but of a varied style. While constructed as four separate buildings, their Atlantic Avenue facades read as a unified, almost symmetrical composition designed in the Abstracted Classicist style with simple yet strong Secessionist details, particularly in the center building. The focal point is its two polychromatic ceramic tile mosaics depicting pastoral scenes. These mosaics are thought to be some of the largest decorative tile installations from the American

Encaustic Tile Company. They provide a whimsical element to the industrial building, as well as acknowledging the company's agrarian connections. Both Engelhardt and Strack were prominent architects of their time and well known throughout Brooklyn. Engelhardt designed many manufacturing and commercial buildings in Brooklyn, including many structures in the designated Eberhard Faber Pencil Company Historic District. Strack incorporated significant amounts of steel into his designs and used his Vienna-based training to create simple yet monumental buildings. These utilitarian brick buildings, which speak to the history of industrial Brooklyn and East New York, were responses to the changing conditions of dairy production throughout New York City and the nation; each was built to help advance the sanitation and production scale of the dairy industry in New York City.

Building Description

The Empire State Dairy Company Buildings

The Empire State Dairy Company Buildings consist of six structures grouped into two, roughly symmetrical compositions fronting on Atlantic Avenue. They represent two distinct periods of construction embodying different stylistic applications. The earlier section, built in 1906-07, occupies the western side of the site and features traditional stylistic elements derived from the Renaissance Revival and Romanesque Revival styles. The later portion, built in 1914-15, sits on the eastern part of the lot and displays abstracted Classical details suggestive of Secessionism. Prominent features of the 1914-15 wing are the monumental industrial windows in the taller central section framed by brick piers with large polychromatic ceramic tile mosaics depicting pastoral scenes, and oversized corbeled capitals. Though of slightly varying heights and expressions, the buildings' consistent use of brick, rhythm of window openings and structural bays, and overall scale and proportions create a unified ensemble.

Office and Dwelling Building (at the northwest corner of the lot with developed facades on Atlantic Avenue and Schenk Avenue), 1906-07

Atlantic Avenue facade

The Atlantic Avenue facade combines two structures into a unified facade, which is six bays wide at the upper stories with four irregular bays at the ground floor, and features a variety of arched windows and terra-cotta ornament.

Historic

Four irregular bays at the ground story; six bays at

the upper stories; brick and terra-cotta facing; splayed brick lintels and projecting keystones at the first story; brick piers topped by stylized capitals and denticulated pressed tin cornice at the first story, topped by a terra-cotta band; round-arch second-story fenestration with radiating brick lintels on projecting imposts, projecting keystones, and tympani filled with terra-cotta panels featuring angular, floral and foliated decoration; segmental third story fenestration with bracketed sills, radiating brick lintels with projecting imposts and keystones; terra-cotta cornice with bracketed arches, horizontal grooves, blocks and molded crown; brick parapet topped by stone coping.

Alterations

Basement and first story painted; basement and two first-story windows sealed with brick; storefront infilled with brick and steel windows; signboard at pressed tin cornice; replacement sash; terra-cotta panels removed from some second-story windows; some foreshortened and sealed windows at the second and third stories; section of roof parapet modified.

Schenk Avenue facade

Historic

Six irregular bays at the ground story; seven bays at the upper story; brick and terra-cotta facing; segmental fenestration with splayed brick lintels, projecting imposts, and projecting keystones at the first story; brick piers topped by stylized capitals and denticulated pressed tin cornice at the first story, topped by a terra-cotta band; round-arch second-story fenestration with radiating brick lintels on projecting imposts, projecting keystones, and tympani filled with terra-cotta panels featuring angular, floral and foliated decoration; segmental third story fenestration with bracketed sills, radiating brick lintels with projecting imposts and keystones; two-bay, terra-cotta oriel at the second and third stories on molded base in blocks, paneled piers,

scrolled and paneled keystones, paneled and projecting spandrels (with floral motifs) on stylized bases, and surmounting molded crown on blocks; terra-cotta cornice with bracketed arches, horizontal grooves, blocks and molded crown; brick parapet topped by stone coping.

Alterations

Basement and first story painted; first-story windows partially infilled with brick and steel windows; non-historic door and roll down gate at entryway; storefront infilled with brick and steel windows; signboard at pressed tin cornice; replacement sash; sealed windows at the second story; alarm boxes.

South elevation

Five bays; 2-over-2 wood sash; painted facade; cornice return; downspouts and gutters; wiring.

Roof

Elevator and stair bulkheads; foisting equipment.

Dairy Plant (at the northeast corner of the lot with developed facades on Atlantic Avenue and Barbey Street), 1914-15

Atlantic Avenue facade

The Atlantic Avenue facade arranges four structures into an almost-symmetrical composition consisting of a central, taller portion flanked by two simpler, lower sections. The eastern-most section, which combines two structures, is five bays wide with punched window openings with brick lintels at upper floors, some altered and combined, and a large ground floor freight entryway into the easternmost structure. The central section features monumental steel windows, piers with tile mosaics, and a brick parapet which originally carried signage between corbeled brick towers. The western section consists of a fourth building, six bays wide, with fenestration similar to the eastern section and a slightly projecting western bay.

Historic

14 bays with a three bay projecting central section with monumental fenestration filled with steel sash, paneled piers with ceramic tiles mosaic of pastoral scenes, brick dentils, molded crown, piers surmounted by short, brick towers with elongated brackets on curved bases, corbelled brick, and stone coping blocks; stone water table; projecting window sills; stretcher brick lintels; multi-pane sash; stone crown; brick parapet with stone coping blocks; remnant of Borden sign.

Alterations

Basement and first-story painted; modified freight entryway; two of the three central bays filled in with brick at the lower portions; two windows at the second story combined into one and filled with steel casements; central gable removed and replaced with brick parapet wall and stone coping blocks; pier caps removed; electrical conduits; utility meter; ventilation pipe.

Barbey Street facade

Historic

Four bays; first-story painted; projecting sills; stretcher brick lintels; steel casements; molded cornice; brick parapet with stone coping blocks.

Alterations

Freight entrances sealed with brick; window grilles at the second story; curved screen at one of the third-story windows.

South elevation

Sixteen bays; projecting sills; steel lintels and repointed or replaced brick; steel casements; gutter and drainpipes; connective bridges to nearby buildings.

Roof

Elevator and stair bulkheads; brick smoke stack with metal reinforcement straps; solar panels.

Site History

The Empire State Dairy Company Buildings

East New York¹

Located on the eastern edge of central Brooklyn, East New York was part of the town of New Lots and remained rural in character through most of the 19th century. In 1835, businessmen John Pitkin and George W. Thrall purchased a large tract of land, consisting of three farms, and named it East New York. They built a large shoe factory upon a portion of it and also had the land surveyed and laid out in lots. By mid-century, German immigrants were settling there and improvements in transportation and infrastructure hastened development. Horsecars reached the area in 1859; other transportation enhancements soon followed and the population grew from 1,000 in 1860 to 18,000 in 1880. A village charter was adopted in 1871. This part of Kings County was annexed to Brooklyn in 1886. Industrial and residential growth accelerated after the opening of the Williamsburg Bridge in 1903 and completion of a subway line in 1922.

By 1940, the neighborhood was largely occupied by German, Italian, Russian, Polish, and Lithuanian families. After World War II, these families began to move to the suburbs and were replaced by a growing number of African American families. At the same time, the industrial base of the city began to erode, and unemployment, housing deterioration and building abandonment took hold. The situation was made worse by misguided attempts at urban renewal and “redlining” by banks that refused to issue new mortgages in the area, as well as deferred maintenance of infrastructure and reduced

social services, caused by the City’s financial crisis in the 1970s.

Beginning with the establishment of the East Brooklyn Industrial Park in 1980, other revitalization projects, such as the “Nehemiah” houses,² began to take hold and the neighborhood, which was still plagued by the drug epidemics of the 1980s and 90s, began to recover from the blighted conditions of previous decades. The neighborhood also began to attract new immigrants from the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. These trends continue to the present.

Milk Production and Processing in New York City³

Until the mid-1800s, fresh cow’s milk was a very small part of the American diet. The elevation of cow’s milk into a commonplace food largely resulted from the rise of the industrial city, technological advancements in transportation and milk processing, and the work of progressive public officials, public-health advocates, and urban reformers who were especially active in New York City.

The presence of milk cows in the city dates to its earliest days as a Dutch colony. In the early 1800s, farmers on the city’s outskirts sold their milk to vendors who peddled it from door to door in buckets. The 1820s and 1830s saw the rise of “swill dairies” on the grounds of local distilleries, where cows kept in fetid, cramped conditions were fed on grain mash left over from the distilling process. These cows produced a thin, bluish milk, often contaminated with bacteria, that was adulterated with starch, plaster, chalk, or other additives to give it a natural appearance. Regular milk shipments from rural dairy farms began in 1842, when the Erie Railroad first carried fresh milk in special ice-cooled cars from Goshen, New York to its terminal in New Jersey, where it was transported by ferry to Manhattan, and by 1850, millions of gallons of milk

were being shipped every year to the city by railroad. Milk consumption increased, especially among children, as breastfeeding fell out of favor among the upper-middle class—who emulated the wealthy, but could not afford their nurses—and among working-class women, whose jobs took them away from their children for much of the day. By the 1880s, the city’s “milk shed” sprawled over hundreds of miles, encompassing dairy farms in New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Pennsylvania, and rural New York State.

Despite the increasing availability of milk from country farms, the city’s milk supply remained unsafe, even deadly, especially for children. A potential carrier of typhoid and tuberculosis from diseased cows, milk was often contaminated during its handling, transportation, and sale as “loose milk,” which was purchased by the ladleful from open cans in neighborhood groceries. Efforts to address this health crisis began in the 1830s, and over subsequent decades, reformers and muckraking journalists pressed the government for regulations that would improve the city’s milk supply. Their efforts were fruitful, as New York banned swill dairies and the adulteration of milk in the 1860s and 1870s and started requiring permits for milk vendors in 1896, inaugurating “the present effective system of controlling and protecting the milk supplies of cities.”⁴ In 1906, all dairy farms and milk retailers serving New York City were required to submit to inspection. Technological advancements, including the introduction of the milk bottle in the 1880s and the adoption of pasteurization in the early 1890s, played a major role in improving milk’s safety. In 1893, Nathan Straus, the co-owner of the Macy’s and Abraham & Straus department stores, opened the first of his charitable milk dispensaries, where poor families could purchase pasteurized bottled milk at a nominal price. Straus’ milk depots contributed to a rapid drop in the children’s death rate and were

copied in other cities. By 1914, pasteurization was required for all milk sold in New York City. In addition to improving milk’s safety, pasteurization and bottling encouraged the mechanization of milk processing in large high-volume plants. “As a result,” according to the historian E. Melanie DuPuis, “the freshness and purity of milk became the product of an industrial system,” and the modern bottling plant came to symbolize clean, wholesome milk, rapidly delivered from cow to consumer in sparkling, sealed bottles.⁵ At least one New York milk processor provided viewing balconies in its plant so that consumers could witness firsthand the efficient, hygienic nature of its bottling process.⁶ By the 1920s, milk delivered by the city’s largest dairy companies was “uniformly pure, fresh, and of good keeping quality,” providing New York City with “the best milk supply of any large city in the world.”⁷

Before World War II, dairies’ centralized urban locations and proximity to rail lines facilitated the intake of bulk milk, as well as the transportation of bottled milk to neighborhood distribution centers and along home-delivery routes. But in the years leading up to and following the war, tanker trucks largely replaced railroads, disposable paper cartons replaced glass bottles, and supermarkets became the main retail channel for dairy products. Home deliveries steeply declined, and by the 1950s, many dairies had relocated to the outskirts of the city. In the early 1930s, at least 29 pasteurization plants operated in New York City, but today, only one is left.⁸ Few distinctive reminders still stand of an industry that once had an architectural presence, through its pasteurization and bottling plants, distribution centers, garages, and stables, in virtually every New York City neighborhood. The Empire State Dairy buildings are distinguished remnants of both a once-bustling dairying complex and a vanished era. Dating from the period in which New York City’s milk was renowned for its outstanding

quality following decades of innovation and reform, they are also reminders of the city's signature role in improving milk's safety and quality, and in making fresh cows' milk a major part of the American diet.

The Empire State Dairy Company and the Borden Company⁹

Little is known about the early history of the Empire State Dairy Company, which was founded in 1869 according to company literature. By the early-20th century, the company's headquarters was located at 502 Broadway in Brooklyn. In 1905, the Empire State Dairy Company purchased from John and Anna Wierk a large lot at the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Schenck Avenues in East New York, Brooklyn, which was occupied at the time by a number of brick, one- and three-story buildings. The company had apparently been already renting and occupying the property at the time of purchase. In early 1906, the company filed plans with the Department of Buildings to erect a four new buildings on the site, including a one-story brick wagon shed, a three-story brick dairy plant (facing Schenck Avenue), a three-story brick office and dwelling for two families (at the northwest corner of the lot with developed facades on both Schenck and Atlantic Avenues), and a three story, T-shaped brick stable (with facade exposures on all three streets: Atlantic Avenue, Schenck Avenue, and Barbey Street). Theobald Engelhardt served as the architect of all the buildings (of which only the office and dwelling at the northwest corner of the lot are included in this designation).¹⁰ The office and dwelling building, completed in 1907, is a Renaissance/Romanesque Revival style building with terra-cotta details. The building features a decorative bay along Schenck Avenue, as well as a series of tympani along the second-floor windows. Both the terra-cotta bay and tympani feature stylized keystones, brackets and flora details. Over the next decade, Empire gradually

bought additional lots on the block to the east and south, and by 1914 owned the entire blockfront of Atlantic Avenue between Schenck Avenue and Barbey Street.

In late 1916, the company announced that it had opened a new facility on Atlantic Avenue in East New York which, in addition to its headquarters, included a pasteurizing plant, a churning plant for producing cheese, and a bottling department. The facility was described as having up-to-date machinery and employing the most hygienic processes. The company also claimed to distribute millions of quarts of milk annually. At the time, Empire had other facilities located in Williamsburg, Gowanus, Flushing, Jamaica, and Long Island City. In 1924, the Empire State Dairy Company was acquired by the Borden Company in a litigious transaction that included the East New York plant.¹¹ A year before the sale, Empire claimed to be the largest milk company in Brooklyn.¹²

The Borden Company, originally named the New York Condensed Milk Company and later the Borden Condensed Milk Company, was founded in 1856 by Gail Borden (1801-1874), who established a milk depot on Canal Street in Manhattan and a processing plant in Wollcottsville, Connecticut. Borden's produced a condensed milk product that employed a vacuum evaporation method that he had patented. The business failed, but in 1858, he teamed up with a local grocer, Jeremiah Milbank (1818-1884), to form the New York Condensed Milk Company, which met with great success by touting the product as being sanitary and pure, as compared to the contaminated and adulterated milk that was dominant at that time. Delivery routes quickly grew across the developed areas of Manhattan and Brooklyn. During the Civil War, the business expanded further as the company provided a steady supply of canned milk to soldiers. Soldiers returning home to other cities around the country after the war

praised the product, greatly increasing demand for it beyond the New York City area.

The company's continued expansion after the war led to further improvements in milk production and the development of the modern dairy industry.¹³ The company began deliveries of fluid milk began in New York City in 1875, and the company's first bottling plant opened in 1885. The company was incorporated in 1899 as the Borden Condensed Milk Company. It dominated the industry in the first decades of the 20th century by acquiring other dairies and ice cream producers, including the Empire State Dairy Company.¹⁴ The company began a large-scale diversification effort in 1928, purchasing companies in Canada and Europe. In 1932, Borden introduced Elmer's Glue-All, which became the most popular household glue in the United States.¹⁵ As in during the Civil War, the company supplied dairy products to American forces during the First and Second World Wars, while also providing synthetic adhesives to the military during the latter conflict. The company expanded into plastics and chemicals in the 1950s, and into rubber in the 1960s. The firm relocated its headquarters from New York City to Columbus, Ohio, in 1969. Its food business was expanded in the 1980s and the company was sold to a large food conglomerate, Kohlberg, Kravis, Roberts and Company, in 1994. After that, Borden's New York City processing plants were discontinued, although the Borden had disposed of the East New York plant in 1982.

The Architects¹⁶

Born in Brooklyn and a graduate of Cooper Union, Theobald M. Engelhardt (1851-1935) at first worked with his father, a master carpenter and native of Germany, as a carpenter and builder.¹⁷ During this period he also interned in the office of architect William B. Ditmars. Engelhardt opened his own architectural office in Brooklyn in 1877, and over the

course of the next several decades produced plans for hundreds of buildings, mainly in Brooklyn. His work included houses, factories, breweries, hospitals, banks, churches, and dairies, as well as buildings located within the Greenpoint Historic District, the Brooklyn Heights Historic District, the Stuyvesant/Expanded Stuyvesant Heights Historic District, the Eberhard Faber Pencil Company Historic District, and the Prospect Heights Historic District. He lived in Brooklyn for most of his life, where he was active in many civic and professional organizations. He later moved to Queens, and remained there until his death. His son, Theobald H. Engelhardt (1886-1964), was also an architect and active in his firm.

Otto Strack (1857-1935) was born in Germany where he learned the trades of carpenter, joiner, blacksmith, and mason. He studied at polytechnic schools in Berlin and Vienna, graduating in 1879. Strack moved to Chicago in 1881 and there opened a civil engineering office. In 1888, he relocated to Milwaukee and gained popularity as an architect of high quality buildings in traditional European styles. His work was heavily influenced by German Renaissance and Baroque architecture and his buildings are often quite ornamental.

In 1890, Strack was appointed supervising architect for the Pabst Brewing Company, a position which he held for four years. In that capacity he designed many brewery buildings and corner saloons in the mid-west, as well as the Pabst Theatre, the Pabst Power House, and an addition to the Pabst residence in Milwaukee. The Pabst Theatre was especially prominent for its use of steel cantilevered balconies, described as the first of their kind. In these years Strack also designed the many other buildings in and around Chicago and Milwaukee, and several dairies across the country.

By 1900, Strack had opened an office in New York, serving as architect for the George Fuller

Construction Company. He also was owner and president of the New York Realty Corporation. Strack designed casino buildings for Pabst at Coney Island and in Harlem, a hotel in Times Square, and the Pabst Grand Central Restaurant at Columbus Circle. He was also an accomplished painter and organist, having helped in the design and construction of what was the largest pipe organ in the work in Atlantic City's Convention Hall.

The Empire State Dairy Buildings¹⁸

The design of the 1906-07 office building displays architectural detailing closely related to, but somewhat more ornate than the Renaissance Revival style that was also used during that period by the developers of many German-American residential neighborhoods such as Bushwick and Ridgewood, which combined classical and Romanesque elements. Is a refinement of the American industrial interpretation of the German Renaissance Revival or *Rundbogenstil*, which developed in the 1830s and 1840s, which “synthesized classical and medieval architecture—particularly the round-arched elements of those styles—and relied on brick and locally available stone.”¹⁹ Despite its name, buildings constructed in the American version of the *Rundbogenstil* style often used economical segmental-headed window openings. They also utilized corbelling, patterning, and other forms of decorative brickwork, to model and bring variety to their facades, and had parapets that sometimes varied in height and sometimes featured pediments, bringing additional visual interest. The Empire office building includes some *Rundbogenstil* elements, but in an updated form that incorporates more Renaissance Revival style detailing, such as scrolled brackets, keystones, oriels, floral elements. The availability of terra cotta architectural components no doubt played a part in the more ornate quality of this later iteration of the style.

In January 1914, Empire filed plans with the city for a new dairy plant building located along Atlantic Avenue at the corner of Barbey Street, requiring either the demolition or incorporation of sections of the existing buildings on the site, and for an additional new building facing Barbey Street, about 100 feet south of Atlantic Avenue (The Barbey Street building is not part of this designation).²⁰ The architect for both buildings was Otto Strack. Strack's design for the new Atlantic Avenue building was executed in an Abstracted Classicist style with simple yet strong Secessionist details. The restrained simplicity of this building allows its monumental scale to be a prominent presence on Atlantic Avenue. The Atlantic Avenue facade includes two polychromatic ceramic tile mosaics by the American Encaustic Tile Company that depict pastoral scenes.

Strack's design for the 1914-15 addition reflects a further evolution of industrial architecture toward more simplified, but bolder forms of expression, such as the raised central section with large expanses of glass formed by tall, rectangular window openings filled with multi-paned steel sash and the linear ornamentation of the piers with restrained, geometric designs. The vertical emphasis of its projecting piers and abstracted sculptural forms suggest Secessionist architecture.

Strack's annex buildings are representative of a distinctly American approach to modern architecture, in particular, the search for an appropriate style or appearance for industrial buildings, with or without historicist references, as an appropriate architectural expression of function. The result is seen in the many unadorned, economical designs for commercial and utilitarian structures, such as warehouses and “daylight” factories.

Although the aesthetic basis of American industrial building design was rarely strictly

utilitarian, neither was it ever firmly rooted in the traditions of recognized architectural styles. These trends, which relied largely on advancements in construction technology and locally available material, became the basis for both commercial and industrial building design. By the 19th and early 20th centuries, the articulation of monumental arcades had become the tradition of warehouses and other building types in New York City.²¹ The facades of the Empire State Dairy Company's 1914-15 annex clearly follow in this tradition.

The American Encaustic Tiling Company²²

A prominent and significant feature of the Atlantic Avenue facade is decorative use of two large ceramic tile panels, produced by the American Encaustic Tile Company, on the end piers of the central section. The company, which was founded in 1875 under the name of Fischer and Lansing, operated until the mid-20th century. It produced dust-pressed encaustic floor tiles and standard utilitarian wall tiles, as well as a wide variety of decorative art tiles, and was considered in the early 20th century to be one of the largest tile manufacturers in the world. The company's headquarters was located in New York City and its building at 16 East 41 Street featured the manufacturer's tile on the facade (now altered). The company's plants were in Zanesville, Ohio, and Perth Amboy, New Jersey. The company also maintained showrooms to sell its products. In addition to the Empire State Dairy and its own building, American Encaustic's other New York City works include the 2 Park Avenue, Manhattan, decorative tiles in the Holland Tunnel, the Loew's Valencia in Jamaica, Queens, and the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle in Woodhaven, Queens.

Encaustic tiles are concrete tiles in which the pattern or the figure on the surface is not a product of the glaze, but of the use of different colors of clay. The pattern is inlaid into the body of the tile.

Encaustic tiles may be glazed or not and the inlay may be as shallow as an eighth of an inch or as deep as a quarter inch. This method of tile making first appeared in the 13th century and remained widely used until the 16th century. The use of encaustic tiles was revived during the Victorian era, and gained increasing popularity at the turn of the century. They remained in wide use into the mid-century.

The colorful panels produced by American Encaustic specifically for the Empire Dairy depict bucolic Alpine scenes; on the east side is man holding a cow in a field with a pond and mountains in the background, and on the west is a young woman with a cow and a calf in a similar field. Each of the panels is comprised of 68, 9" or 12" polychromatic, high relief encaustic tiles (five tiles across by 13 down, with three tiles in a bottom 14th row). The panels were possibly designed by the artist Leon Victor Solon (1872-1957), who served as the Art Director of the American Encaustic Tiling Company from 1912 to 1928. A native of England, Solon was the son of a French artist who fled to England during the Franco-Prussian War. The elder Solon became the managing director of the Minton Works, producers of fine porcelain, in Stoke-on Trent, where Leon combined an apprenticeship with his studies at the Hanley School of Art and later became the Art Director at Minton. In 1905, he left Minton for the design department at Liverpool University, and immigrated to the United States in 1909, settling in New York City. He became the New York representative and art director at American Encaustic in 1912. Afterwards, he served as art director at a number of other tile companies, and was the chief colorist for Rockefeller Center as part of the design team for the complex.

Later History

The building's interior and exterior were altered several times during the 20th century. Exterior

changes on the 1906-07 building consist mainly of the infilling of a number first-story windows and the original storefront, as well as painting of the first-story facade and changes to the roof parapet. On the 1914-15 building, there have been changes to the freight entrances, basement and first-story windows, combining and enlarging second floor windows in the eastern section, as well as painting of the lower part of the facades, and removal of the central gable and the piers caps at the monumental central bays. The installation of hoisting equipment and elevator bulkheads have taken place on the roof, and the smoke stack appears to have been modified. In 1982, Borden sold the Atlantic Avenue plant to the Royal Plastic Corporation, which occupied the building until recently. Portions of the building were also occupied by the Allied Tile Manufacturing Company.

The site was acquired by LSC Development, LLC, in 2016. The owner testified at the public hearing citing structural issues and significant hazardous waste issues on the site. Subsequent to the public hearing, LSC applied to the New York State Brownfield Cleanup Program, which provides financial incentives to address environmental cleanup at contaminated former industrial and commercial sites in order to bring such sites back into productive use. According to the owner, remediation of the environmental hazards could require substantial excavation and soil removal, as well as associated demolition. This work would be reviewed and approved by the Brownfields program.

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Endnotes

¹ The section is based on the following sources: Eugene L. Armbruster, *The Eastern District of Brooklyn* (New York: Eugene Armbruster, 1912), 57-59, 124; Henry B. Howard, ed., *The Eagle and Brooklyn: History of Brooklyn from its Settlement to the Present Time* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1893), 726; Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Public School 65K Designation Report* (LP-2007), (New York, NY: City of New York, 1981); Ellen Marie Snyder-Grenier, "East New York," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 357; Henry R. Stiles, ed., *A History of Kings County, Including the City of Brooklyn*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), 306-318.

² The program, operated by the Council of East Brooklyn Churches, consisted of the construction of new housing on vacant land and included a mix of one-family row, detached and semi-detached houses, as well as small apartment houses and multi-story public housing.

³ This section is from LPC, *M.H. Renken Dairy Company* (LP-2519), prepared by Michael Caratzas (New York, NY: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2015) and includes the following sources for this section are Thomas D. Beal, "Dairying," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City Second Edition*, 341-42; Tamara Coombs, *Sheffield Farms Stable National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (New York: State Historic Preservation Office, 2005); E. Melanie DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Mary Habstritt, "Manhattanville and New York City's Milk Supply" (LPC files); Brian Solomon and Mike Schafer, *New York Central Railroad* (St. Paul, Minnesota: MBI Publishing, 2007), 132-133; Deborah Valenze, *Milk: A Local and Global History* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2011), 178-278; R.J. O'Hare, "Development of Milk Transportation," *American Creamery and Poultry Produce Review* (June 25, 1930), 376-79; and Henry Doherty, "The Story of a Milk Train," *American Milk Review* (August 1947), 18-20.

⁴ Chester Roadhouse and James Lloyd Henderson, *The Market-Milk Industry, Second Edition* (New York:

McGraw-

Hill, 1950), 7, cited in DuPuis, 40.

⁵ DuPuis, 82.

⁶ "\$500,000 Building for Sanitary Milk," *New York Times*, July 11, 1909, 8.

⁷ DuPuis, 87.

⁸ Josh Kosman, "Dairy Wants to Milk City," *New York Post*, December 21, 2012 (nypost.com/2012/12/21/dairy-wants-to-milk-city), accessed September 17, 2013. According to the Elmhurst Dairy in Jamaica, Queens, "In 1970, there were approximately 30 milk processing facilities in New York City, and today Elmhurst Dairy is the only plant remaining" (<http://www.elmhurstdairy.com/about/our-story/>, accessed June 15, 2015).

⁹ This section is based on the following sources: *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 26, 1916, 67; Mar. 4, 1923, 36; Feb. 21, 1924, 14; Thomas M. Hilbink, "Borden," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 128-129; Lawrence C. Swayne, "The Borden of Wallkill," *Kaatskill Life* (Spring 2016), 17-25, and *Uppington's General Directory of Brooklyn*, 1904.

¹⁰ Sections of two of the other buildings from 1906-07 remain, but are not included in this designation.

¹¹ The sale included the aforementioned facilities, as well as a plant located in Hollis, Queens. The firm also had 15 plants located upstate, also well as operations in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

¹² The *New York Times* stated that the Empire State Dairy Company was the third largest in the metropolitan area. *NYT*, Jan. 28, 1924, 7. The firm was initially sold in early 1924 to the Dairymen's League Co-operative Association, but a lawsuit filed against the purchase by Borden resulted in Borden being awarded Empire's New York City operations. *NYT*, Feb. 1, 1924, 8.

¹³ John Gail Borden, assumed control of the company upon his father's death.

¹⁴ In 1919, the Borden Company had 21 milk plants, eight dairy farms, 156 bottling plants, and 70 pasteurization plants throughout the United States.

¹⁵ The advertising icon for Elmer's glue was a cartoon bull named "Elmer." In the late 1930's marketer David William Reid created the "Elsie the Cow" cartoon advertising mascot, which quickly became the face of the company, remaining so for several decades.

¹⁶ The section is based on the following sources: LPC, *Bedford Stuyvesant/Expanded Stuyvesant Heights Historic District Designation Report* (LPC-2496), Architects' Appendix by Marianne Percival (New York, NY: City of New York, 2013); *Ladies' Mile Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1609), prepared by the Research Department (New York, NY: City of New York, 1989); *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1935, 19; Oct. 23, 1964, 39; Carl William Schlegel, *Schlegel's American Families of German Ancestry in the United States v.1* (New York: Genealogical Publishing Co. 2003), 389, 391, 393-394, 397; *Souvenir of Brooklyn: Descriptive Historical & Statistical Review* (New York: Anderson & Gillette, 1890), 70.

¹⁷ The Engelhardtts were descended from a notable Bavarian family who were large landowners and horticulturalists in Baden. Philip Engelhardt, Theobold's father, built a number of Brooklyn's breweries and factories in the mid-19th century.

¹⁸ This section is based on the following sources: Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 11, 1906, 16; Jan. 2, 1914, 27; Kings County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Liber 34, p. 149 (Dec. 30, 1905); LPC, *American Bank Note Company Printing Plant Designation Report* (LP-2298), prepared by Betsy Bradley and Jennifer Most (New York, N.Y. City of New York, 2008); *Wheatworth Bakery Building Designation Report* (LP-2262), prepared by Donald G. Presa (New York, NY: City of New York, 2008); and Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps Borough of Brooklyn, New York* (1904-08), v. 8, pl. 12.

¹⁹ *The Works*, 235.

²⁰ Two filings were reported simultaneously by the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 2, 1914, one for a new 3-story brick stable building facing Barbey Street and another for exterior alterations to the existing stable building. (Additional source: New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Brooklyn, New Building applications [NB716-1914 and NB718-1914]).

²¹ LPC, *Thomson Meter Company Designation Report* (LPC-2139), prepared by Jay Shockley (New York, NY: City of New York, 2004).

²² The section is based upon the following sources: "American Encaustic Tiling Co. Zansville, Ohio" (www.tileheritage.org); Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "'This Extraordinary Demand for Color': Leon Solon and

Architectural Polychromy, 1909-1939," paper presented at the Tile Heritage Foundation Annual Meeting, 1993; Riley Doty, "British Tile Makers in the United States: 1910-1940," *Journal of the Tiles & Architectural Ceramics Society*, v.17 (2011), 8-11; 2011 New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, "Empire State Dairy (later Borden Dairy)" Resource Evaluation form, 2015.

Findings and Designation

The Empire State Dairy Company Buildings

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Empire State Dairy Company Buildings 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.

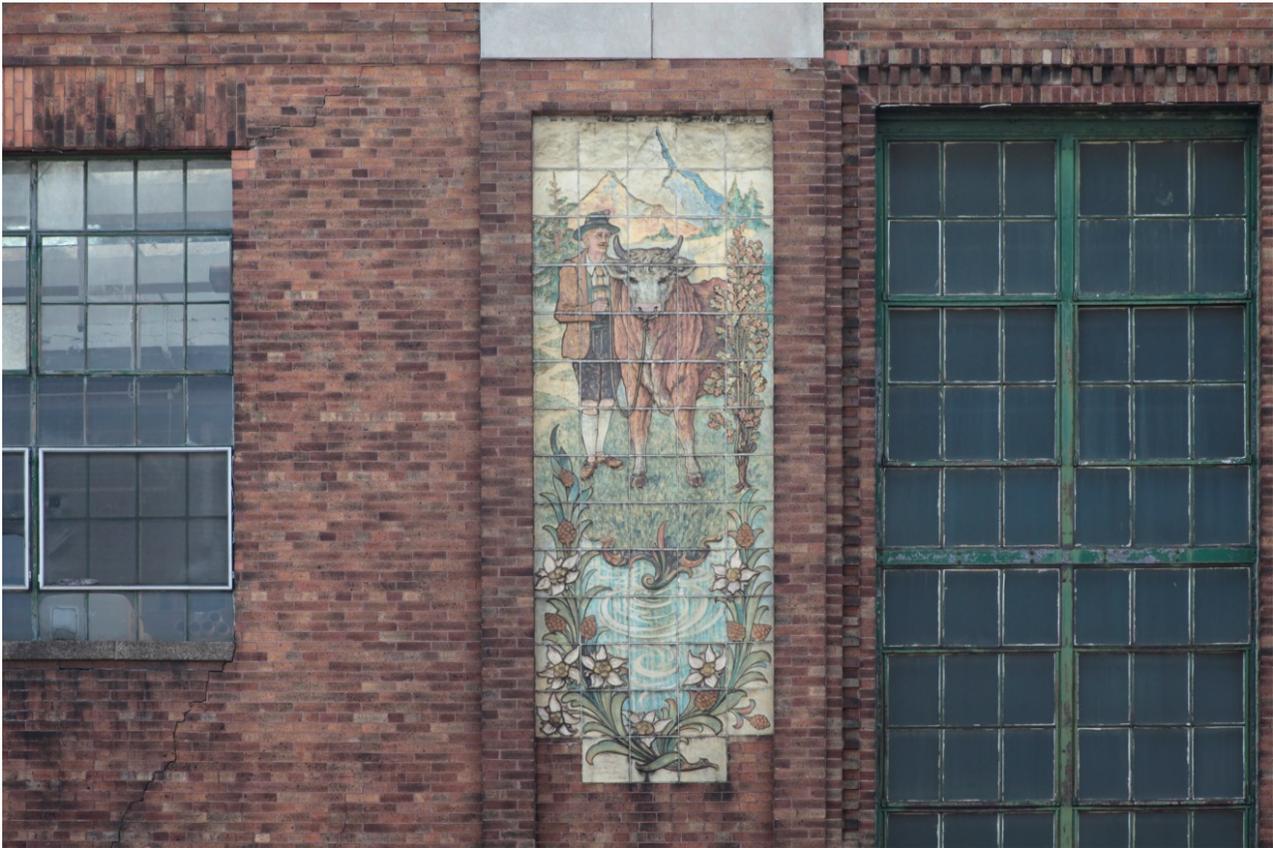
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Empire State Dairy Company Buildings are significant industrial buildings in East New York that serve as a reminder of the importance of the dairy industry in New York City's history; that the buildings sit prominently along a full block of Atlantic Avenue; that the Atlantic Avenue frontage consists of six buildings representing two distinct periods of construction embodying different stylistic applications; that the earlier buildings display terra-cotta details of the Renaissance and Romanesque Revival styles; that the later buildings form an almost symmetrical arrangement and have unique features designed in the Abstracted Classicist style with simple yet strong Secessionist details, particularly in the center building; that the focal point is the center building with its two polychromatic ceramic tile mosaics depicting pastoral scenes that are thought to be some of the largest decorative tile installations from the American Encaustic Tile Company; that these mosaics provide a whimsical element to the industrial building, as well as acknowledging the company's agrarian connections; that the architects of these buildings, Theobald Elgelhardt and Otto

Strack, were prominent architects of their time and well known throughout Brooklyn; and that these buildings, which speak to the history of industrial Brooklyn and East New York, advanced the sanitation and production scale of the dairy industry in New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Empire State Dairy Company Buildings, 2840 Atlantic Avenue (aka 2840-2844 Atlantic Avenue; 181-185 Schenck Avenue), and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 3964, Lot 8 in part, including the six structures forming the Atlantic Avenue frontage of the complex in the northern portion of the lot between Schenck Avenue and Barbey Street, extending from the Atlantic Avenue facades south to include the rear facades of these three-story buildings, and the land beneath them, exclusive of the one-story shed and structures beyond it in the southern portion of the lot, be designated as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

Adi Shamir-Baron
Frederick Bland
Diana Chapin
Michael Goldblum
John Gustafsson
Jeanne Lufy
Kim Vauss
Commissioners



Ceramic Tile Mosaic, Empire State Dairy Company Buildings
Sarah Moses (LPC), November 2017



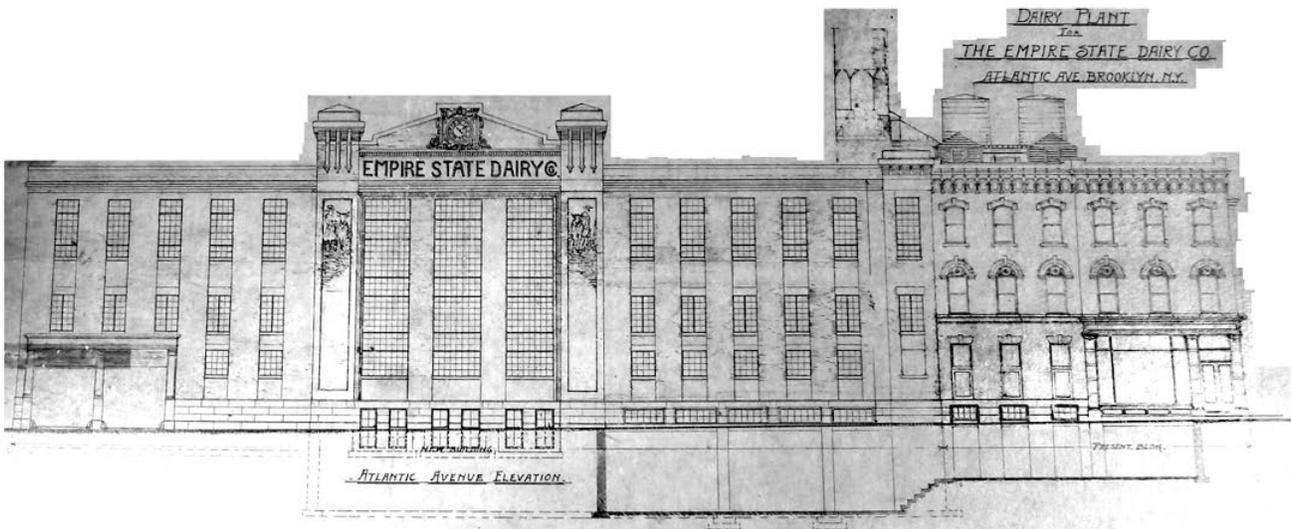
Empire State Dairy Company Buildings
Sarah Moses (LPC), November 2017



Ceramic Tile Mosaic, Empire State Dairy Company Buildings
Sarah Moses (LPC), November 2017



Empire State Dairy Company Buildings
Sarah Moses (LPC), November 2017



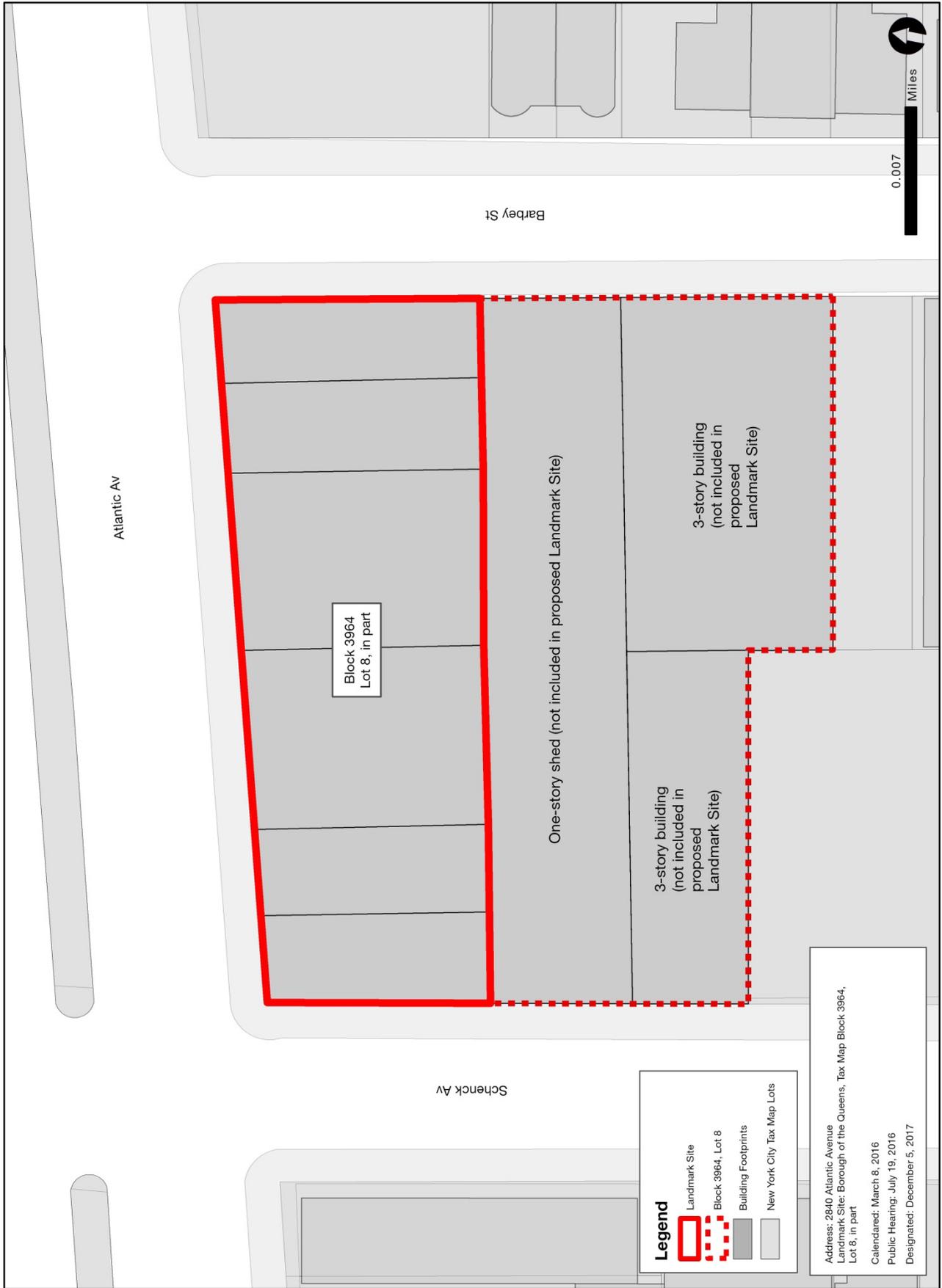
Elevation Plan, c.1913
From the Royal Plastic Company, featured on the Architectural Tiles in New York City blog, run by Michael Padwee



Barbey Street Facade, Empire State Dairy Company
Sarah Moses (LPC), March 2016



Pre-1913, photograph postcard of the Empire State Dairy
Brian Merlis Archives, featured on the Architectural Tiles
in New York City blog, run by Michael Padwee



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 16v2, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 12.5.2017