

Furcraft Building



Furcraft Building

LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan
242-246 West 30th Street

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

With its grand Neoclassical design and prominent fox sculptures overlooking the thoroughfare once known as “Furriers’ Street,” the Furcraft Building is a monument to Manhattan’s Fur District and to New York’s leading role in the international fur business in the 20th century.



Furcraft Building

August 2025

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Furcraft Building

242-246 West 30th Street, Manhattan

Designation List 546

LP-2690

Built: 1925

Architect: Henry I. Oser

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map
Block 779, Lot 66

Building Identification Number (BIN): 1014303

Calendared: April 22, 2025

Public Hearing: May 20, 2025

On May 20, 2025, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Furcraft Building as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Four people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, Art Deco Society of New York, and Save Chelsea. No one spoke in opposition.

Summary

Furcraft Building

The Furcraft Building is a monument to Manhattan's Fur District, the worldwide center of the fur business in the 20th century. Built in 1925 on a section of West 30th Street then known as "Furriers' Street," this 14-story building stands out for its dramatic massing, grand Neoclassical design, and distinctive ornament, particularly its two handsome fox sculptures overlooking its entrance—and Furriers' Street—from atop tall Corinthian pilasters.

The Furcraft Building was constructed as the city's fur center consolidated in the area south of Pennsylvania Station starting in the late 1910s, paralleling the creation of the greater Garment District. Although fur manufacturers initially occupied repurposed tenement buildings in this area, large fireproof loft buildings rapidly replaced them to create an "entire new fur district" by the early 1920s. At this point, the Fur District stood unchallenged as "the greatest fur trade mart in the entire world," with tens of thousands of people employed in all aspects of the business; about 85% of the country's fur garments were made in New York.

The industry had a rich labor history that saw numerous strikes and rallies throughout the Fur District, including a 1926 strike that won fur workers a 40-hour workweek, and a 1932 strike that guaranteed equal treatment and pay for African American workers. Future President John F. Kennedy rallied workers in the Fur District during his 1960 campaign.

Plans for the Furcraft Building were announced in late 1924. As it neared completion the next year, *Fur Trade Review* classed it with the Fur

District's most modern buildings providing "the last word in beauty, comfort, and design," noting that its developers were "practical furriers" who sought to construct "a monument to the progress of the fur trade." The building's designer, Henry I. Oser, was an immigrant from Kyiv who studied civil engineering at Columbia University and designed several other loft buildings in the Fur and Garment Districts.

In the Furcraft Building, Oser skillfully blended the setback requirements of the 1916 Zoning Resolution with the Neoclassical style. Most of its ornament is concentrated at the ground story, where a classical bronze enframingent, and rusticated surround with two fox sculptures convey the building's function, importance, and luxurious image. Its original storefront opening surrounds featuring cartouches and cornices composed of consoles, foliated corbels, and Vitruvian scrolls, also remain intact. Above the seventh story, the facade steps back in a series of chamfered setbacks. Here, Oser created a secondary decorative focal point, dominated by a two-story terra-cotta Greek temple flanked by buttresses and urns. Few changes have been made to the building other than the replacement of doors and window sashes.

Although the Fur District remained the country's fur center into the 1970s, it was declining by the end of the decade as a result of changing fashions, the shift toward overseas manufacturing, and successful anti-fur campaigns. The tenantry of the Furcraft Building reflected these changes, as jewelry manufacturers, entertainment-related businesses, and textile, fabric, and accessories suppliers increasingly replaced fur businesses by the 1980s. Today, the building houses a variety of commercial tenants while serving as its neighborhood's most evocative reminder of an industry with a rich and complex history in which New York once led the world.

Building Description

Furcraft Building

Description¹

The Furcraft Building is a 14-story store-and-loft building designed by Henry I. Oser and constructed in 1925 on a section of West 30th Street then known as “Furriers’ Street.” Designed in the Neoclassical style, its facade is adorned with a wealth of classical ornament reflecting its builders’ desire to construct “a monument to the progress of the fur trade.” This ornament, concentrated at its base and above the seventh story, was primarily executed in terra cotta, complementing the light-colored face brick of the main facade. Portions of the unadorned, secondary east and west facades are also visible from West 30th Street. The building is little-changed from the time of its completion.

Primary (West 30th Street, North) Facade

The building’s most visually prominent feature, its base, consists of three bays, with two high single-story storefronts flanking a two-story round-arched entrance. The entrance retains its historic metal, likely bronze enframing, featuring pilasters decorated with urns, bucrania, putti, and foliate motifs, and with scrolled brackets supporting a frieze with rectangular end panels. From this frieze, a projecting tablet is supported by foliated brackets alternating with panels with square rosettes similar to those on the enframing’s soffit. The panel has a raised central portion and acanthus-leaf border. It bears the building’s street address beneath a round clock, with a likely historic face and hands, resting on scrolls. Behind the clock, blind Roman latticework with rosettes, flanked by foliated

pilasters, sit beneath a cornice with egg-and-dart, foliate, and denticulated moldings, and crowned by a row of anthemion. The arched space above the cornice is filled with a multi-pane window with a wide central mullion.

The building’s rusticated terra-cotta entrance surround features a stepped arch and pediment containing a central cartouche flanked by garlands. The surround, and its projecting fluted pilasters, rest on granite bases. The pilasters have Corinthian capitals supporting plinths with denticulated pedestals. On these pedestals sit two forward-looking foxes with their tails wrapping in front of them.

The storefronts flanking the entrance are identical. Faced in terra cotta, each has a large square-headed central opening within a smooth ashlar surround and is crowned by a central cartouche resting on a molding and scrolled buttresses. Their cornices each feature fluted end consoles framing a denticulated molding, and foliated corbels supporting a projecting square molding with a Vitruvian scroll. Rusticated blocks line the outer edge of each storefront. The central mullion of the left storefront, and metal grillework at each storefront base, are likely historic. Above each storefront is a horizontal show-window opening.

Above the base, the main facade of the building is primarily faced in light-colored brick laid in running bond. The third through seventh stories are each 12 bays wide. Above the seventh story, the central portion of the facade projects upward, and two denticulated and modillioned terra-cotta cornices with friezes crown the outer portions of the seventh story and the central six-bay portion of the eighth story. Above the eighth story, the main facade takes on the form of three two-story chamfered setbacks. The lowest of these, at the ninth and 10th stories, features a central terra-cotta Greek temple. This temple, flanked by scrolled buttresses and urns, has round columns with foliated capitals, patterned-brick

spandrels with cartouches, a denticulated triangular pediment containing a shield flanked by garlands, and eight window openings. The central portion of the 14th story is crowned by a terra-cotta band with urns and garlands, and a blocky modillioned cornice. The outer portions of this story are crowned by patterned-brick panels with inset diamonds.

A tower projects above the 14th story. It is flanked by two diagonally set plinths and topped by a high single-story portion with openings on its north, east, and west faces.

Alterations

Entrance infill replaced (historic door configuration likely consisted of a three-leaf door on the left leading to the lobby entrance, and a double-leaf door on the right leading to the freight elevator, separated from the lobby doors by a post); camera on main-entrance surround; most storefront infill replaced (c. 1940 “tax photo” shows a paired configuration for the left storefront and a tripartite configuration with central entrance for the right storefront, both with multipane translucent transoms with central pivoting vent sashes); second-story show windows replaced (historically single-pane tripartite, with a wider central sash flanked by casements); upper-story windows replaced (historically three-over-three double-hung); loss of stepped roof, other detail, and narrow openings on tower (historically with Palladian windows on its north, east, and likely west faces); plinths and tower pared.

Secondary East Facade

This facade is partially visible over the four-story building to its east. The facade is of gray brick and the window openings are square-headed.

Alterations

Extensive replacement of brick over window heads with lighter-colored brick; replacement sashes

(historically likely single or grouped three-over-three sashes, matching those on west facade).

Secondary West Facade

This facade is partially visible over the two-story building to its west. The facade is of brick and the openings are square-headed.

Alterations

Some brick replacement, especially toward northern end of facade and over some window openings; replacement sashes (historically single or grouped three-over-three sashes).

History and Significance

Furcraft Building

Furs and Early New York²

Furs were central to the settlement of the Dutch colony of New Netherland and its principal city, New Amsterdam. By the early 1600s, furs were prized European luxury goods, with beaver pelts especially valued for their softness, water resistance, and purported medicinal properties. Although most raw furs came from Russia, French incursions into present-day Canada via the St. Lawrence River opened North America's seemingly limitless supply of furs to the European market by the 1580s. These furs were acquired through trade relationships with coastal Indigenous People that were well established by the early 1600s. Although muskrat, mink, otter, and wildcat skins were harvested in the Dutch colony, beaver pelts were so highly valued that they figured prominently in the seals of both New Netherland and New Amsterdam before later being incorporated into the seal of the City of New York.³

By the early 19th century, New York City had a sizeable wholesale fur market dominated by John Jacob Astor, a German immigrant who had come to control much of the country's western fur trade. Astor used his gains from this business to invest in Manhattan real estate, which would make him the world's richest person. By the late 19th century, the city's fur business was centered on Broadway and Bleecker Streets, with many supporting businesses located on Mercer, Broome, Greene, and other nearby streets in the present-day South Village and SoHo. During the 1910s, the industry began moving to the blocks south of Pennsylvania Station, between Sixth and Eighth

Avenues, within the southern portion of the then-burgeoning Garment District.

The Garment District Prior to Its Development⁴

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the area that would become the Garment District was part of a broader terrain inhabited by Indigenous Peoples known as the Munsee that spanned the lower Hudson to upper Delaware river valleys, and an Indigenous trail ran between what would become Eighth and Ninth Avenues and approximately from 14th to 42nd Streets, ending in a stream that ran into the Hudson River.⁵ Following the nominal "sale" of Manhattan to the Dutch in 1626 the colonists drove the Munsee from Manhattan by the end of the 18th century.⁶ Much of this western section of Manhattan, which today is the area from 25th to 42nd Streets and between Sixth and Ninth Avenues, became farmland during the eighteenth century and remained so until the early nineteenth century.⁷

Between the 1830s and 1860s the city surged northward above 14th Street and developers constructed numerous relatively affordable rowhouses in Midtown West, followed after the Civil War by theaters and hotels and a burgeoning entertainment district.⁸ By the 1870s, thriving extra-legal economies reshaped the side streets and avenues in the vicinity of the new theater and hotel district, and the area between Fifth and Seventh Avenues from 23rd to 42nd Streets became known as the Tenderloin.⁹ The Tenderloin gained a reputation as a place of drinking, gambling, sex work, and graft. However, day to day life in the district was more varied than the sensational depictions of vice that circulated in the popular media. There were neighborhood churches, spaces of manual labor, including factories and breweries, and the residences of low-income New Yorkers who worked in various occupations, such as dressmakers, clerks, and

carpenters.¹⁰ African American, Irish, German, and other immigrant families lived throughout the district in the residential fabric of subdivided brick and brownstone row houses and tenements.¹¹

In this period, the Tenderloin was home to a substantial working-class African American population – who were concentrated in the lower West 30s around Seventh Avenue, but lived throughout the area – and it was also one of few places in the city that offered a chance of social mobility to African Americans through its vibrant music scene, including at the 47-55 West 28th Street Buildings, Tin Pan Alley, designated New York City Landmarks.¹²

Real estate development and the reform efforts of middle- and upper-class white New Yorkers forced African Americans and other working-class residents to leave the neighborhood. In the early 1900s, the Tenderloin became the site of large-scale demolition to make way for the new Pennsylvania Station (1904-1910). The Pennsylvania Railroad Company chose the area in part because of the neighborhood’s sensationalized reputation as a crime-ridden district of working-class residents that included a large Black population. As the historian Hilary Ballon put it, “marked by vice, by race, and by class, the Tenderloin was deemed expendable.”¹³

Similarly, when garment industry leaders sought a new area for the Garment District in the late 1910s, the stretch north from 25th to 42nd Streets and west from Sixth to Ninth Avenues was an efficient choice. Relatively cheap land and a working-class population with little political power to resist redevelopment made Midtown West an appealing candidate. By the 1920s, widespread demolition of rowhouses and tenements was underway and in their place was a landscape of showrooms, factories, and offices for the garment industry.

The Development of the Garment District¹⁴

Nearly all of the structures in what is known as the “Garment District” or “Garment Center” were built in a single decade of the 1920s, and owe their character to a single commercial activity – garment manufacturing -- reflecting the success of a movement against the presence of factories in the vicinity of the Fifth Avenue shopping district.¹⁵

New York City’s garment industry had originated south of Canal Street in the 1850s. Manufacturers of men’s and women’s clothing gradually moved north after the Civil War, occupying workspaces that were close to department and specialty stores that congregated near Union Square and Ladies’ Mile. At the start of the 20th century, Fifth Avenue became an important commercial corridor. The first fashionable retailer to locate here was B. Altman & Company (a New York City Landmark), which opened at Fifth Avenue and 35th Street in 1906, followed by Lord & Taylor (1914, a New York City Landmark) and Arnold Constable & Company (1915).

At this time, factories began to simultaneously pack the area, crowding the avenue and adjacent streets with immigrant workers, particularly around lunchtime.¹⁶ Bemoaned as a “factory invasion” and a “menace to trade,” in March 1916 the Fifth Avenue Association placed advertisements in local newspapers asking: “Shall We Save New York?” Signed by merchants, banks and hotels, the campaign called for “cooperative action.”

Four months later, in July 1916, the Board of Estimate passed a “Building Zone Resolution” to regulate the height and bulk of new buildings throughout New York City, as well as “the location of trades and industries and the location of buildings designed for specific uses.”¹⁷ The garment industry, which promised to leave the Fifth Avenue shopping corridor quickly, supported the districting scheme, anticipating lower rents and the convenience of

consolidation.

Industry leaders chose the West 30s, where less expensive sites could be assembled, and which was accessible to Penn Station and other transit, and plans to create a “permanent home” for the garment industry were announced in December 1919.¹⁸ What followed was an extraordinary building boom. Approximately 100 buildings were erected in the Garment District over the next decade, with construction peaking in 1924-25. It was arguably the first new neighborhood in Manhattan to rise under the 1916 resolution, with the buildings’ often dramatic massing reflecting the resolution’s setback requirements. Frequently faced in light-colored stone, cast stone, and terra cotta, these buildings displayed varied ornamentation, with earlier buildings incorporating classical and medieval influences, and later structures exhibiting a “modern” Gothic and Art Deco style.

New York’s Fur District¹⁹

Bounded by West 25th and West 30th streets, and by Sixth and Eighth Avenues, the growth of New York’s Fur District into the world’s leading fur center paralleled the development of the greater Garment District. Despite the United States’ status, at the turn of the 20th century, as the world’s largest pelt supplier, the country—and New York City—were relatively minor players in the international business. In 1900, London stood unchallenged as “the great fur mart of the world,” and Leipzig, Germany was the international leader in the dressing and dyeing of raw pelts for garment manufacture.²⁰

New York’s eclipsing of London to become the world’s dominant fur center was an outgrowth of World War I. Following the war’s outbreak, in July of 1914, the London fur auction was canceled, and in 1915 the New York Fur Sales Corporation was founded to establish an auction here. By the following year, the New York International Fur

Market claimed “the largest raw fur market, the most successful raw fur merchants, the greatest number of raw fur dealers, the largest number of fur manufacturers, 90% of America’s fur dressers and dyers, [and] the biggest outlet for manufactured furs.”²¹ In 1916, the city’s largest furrier, H. Jaeckel & Sons, celebrated the fur trade’s move “across the ocean” to New York, proclaiming that “the fashion center has moved with the fur center—moved so decisively that there is no longer any question about *the real home of fur fashion*.”²²

In July of 1917, the *New York Times* noted the recent movement of the fur industry to the blocks adjoining Seventh Avenue between West 23rd and 32nd Streets, reporting that “Scores of old houses have been utilized for lofts and the odor of the business is distinctly noticeable.”²³ In 1919, work began on the Fur District’s first notable new building, the Fur Merchants’ Cold Storage Vaults (demolished) on West 27th Street.²⁴ By 1922, according to an account of that year, New York had “solidified its position as the greatest fur trade mart in the entire world, with more than \$500 million represented in the various branches of the industry and at least 50,000 people ... identified with its progress.” About 85% of the country’s fur garments were manufactured in the Fur District, which contained thousands of companies engaged in all aspects of the business, including importing and exporting, fur handling, pelt preparation, wholesaling, storage, and garment manufacture. New York’s fur industry was so productive that it was said to be capable, within one week’s notice, of providing every American with a garment of fur. Processing 29 million pelts per year, it was one of the city’s largest industries, with its businesses increasingly housed in “new loft buildings” that were “rapidly replacing the five- and six-story structures of an earlier day.”²⁵

During this period, the fur industry was not without its critics, including animal advocates who

were disturbed by its trapping practices, and conservation advocates concerned about its potential for exterminating the country's fur-bearing animal populations.²⁶ During the Depression, the Fur District remained much as it was during the 1920s. In 1939, the Federal Writers' Project noted the presence of 2,000 shops doing \$200 million in annual business, in a bustling neighborhood filled with "trucks backed to the curb, loading and unloading; scurrying delivery boys carrying pelts dangling from hangers; salesmen, buyers, and union agents bent on business. Pelts are piled high between dealers' windows, frequently reinforced with iron grillwork. Sometimes a tiger skin is displayed among mink and ermine."²⁷

Labor in New York's Fur Industry²⁸

New York's fur industry had a rich labor history predating the development of the Fur District and continuing through its boom years and after World War II. The high level of craft required of so much fur work provided substantial leverage to its workers and their unions. By the 1920s, fur workers would be known for being among the city's most militant laborers, and by the 1950s, its most prosperous.

In the early 1900s, New York had approximately 10,000 fur workers. Most were Jewish, working alongside Greek, French, Italian, Czech, and Slovak immigrants; women made up about 30% of the workforce. Fur work was debilitating, with most workshops generally consisting of "one or two airless rooms, with 15 to 20 workers. The rooms, the steps, and the halls were strewn all over with the chunks and remnants of fur."²⁹ A survey of fur workers in the early 1910s found that 40% had tuberculosis or asthma, with others suffering from a variety of ailments including bronchitis, chronic colds, and skin disorders.

In 1911, United Hebrew Trades held a mass meeting at University Settlement to begin organizing

fur workers, and the following year, a strike by 9,000 workers won them a 30% raise, a reduction in their workweek to 49 hours, overtime, paid holidays, and the creation of a board to police the cleanliness of their shops. The International Fur Workers Union of the United States and Canada, organized in 1913, successfully negotiated wage increases and workweek reductions as the business boomed and shifted to the new Fur District over succeeding years.

In 1926, the militant fur cutter Ben Gold led the most consequential strike in the history of the industry as head of the New York Furriers' Joint Board. Marked by labor actions throughout the Fur District, the strike won substantial wage increases as well as a 40-hour workweek. In the summer of 1932, Gold staged another strike that quickly spread throughout the Fur District. Despite its occurrence during the depths of the Depression, the strike won a five-day workweek, increased wages, the creation of an unemployment fund, and equal treatment and pay for African American fur workers at a time when many unions, along with employers, discriminated against Black laborers.³⁰

By 1939, over 90% of fur workers were unionized; in that year, Gold joined them with leather workers to form the International Fur and Leather Workers' Union. The constitution of the new organization prohibited the union "from discrimination for reasons of sex, creed, color, nationality, or political belief in considering applications for admissions to membership."³¹ In 1950, practically all of New York's fur workers were unionized and were reportedly among "the highest paid group of industrial employees in the United States."³² At that time, there were approximately 16,000 men and women employed in the industry in New York City.³³ Fur workers remained politically active after World War II, picketing Woolworth's stores in opposition to the segregation of their lunch counters during the early 1960s.³⁴

The Construction and Early History of the Furcraft Building

Before the Furcraft Building's construction, its property at 242-246 West 30th Street held three 25-foot-wide five-story buildings on separate lots.³⁵ The purchase of these parcels by the newly incorporated Furcraft Realty Company, and its planned construction of an \$800,000, "14-story commercial structure to house the fur industry" was reported in December of 1924 in the *New York Times*, *Herald Tribune*, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, and *Women's Wear*.³⁶ Demolition occurred in March and April of 1925, and at the end of April, architect Henry I. Oser's rendering of the building was published in the *New York Sun*.³⁷ In early May, a detailed illustration of the Furcraft Building appeared with other prominent building proposals in the *New York Times* under the headline "Millions of Dollars Going Into Lofts and Apartments."³⁸

Over the preceding few years, the *Times* noted, a "striking metamorphosis" had occurred south of Pennsylvania Station as "rundown tenement houses" were "replaced with fireproof loft buildings" to create an "entire new fur district." In 1923 alone, 12 new structures of "the most modern type" had been completed in the area, ranging from four to 20 stories in height.³⁹ By the mid-1920s, 30th Street between Sixth and Eighth Avenues was known "all over the fur world" as "Furriers' Street" for its concentration of fur-related businesses.⁴⁰ In its September 1925 issue, the trade publication *Fur Trade Review* classed the Furcraft Building, then under construction, with the district's most modern buildings providing "the last word in beauty, comfort, and design." Its developers, who included industry veteran Gerson Sack, were described as "practical furriers who know the furriers' needs and the building is to be, in their mind, a monument to the progress of the fur trade.... The fact that it is

ideally located on 'Furriers' Street' is an added asset for tenants who want to be in the very heart of trade activity."⁴¹ An advertisement in the same issue promoted the building's fireproof construction with full sprinkler system, as well as "permanent daylight throughout."⁴²

Throughout the summer and fall, construction proceeded steadily toward the building's targeted opening of December of 1925. In July, its builders received a variance from the Board of Standards & Appeals that allowed for larger glass panes than were permitted under the city's building code for its first- and second-story storefront and showroom windows.⁴³ A temporary Certificate of Occupancy was issued on December 24, 1925, describing the building's uses as stores and manufacturing space at the first story, and manufacturing and showrooms at the upper floors.⁴⁴ To increase and help protect the Furcraft Building's daylight exposure, its owners formed the Fur Annex Corporation in 1926 to purchase the two five-story buildings to its west, demolish them, and construct a two-story building (not part of this designation) designed by Oser on their former site.⁴⁵

Tenants during the Furcraft Building's early years included the raw fur dealer George I. Fox; the trade industry group the National Association of the Fur Industry;⁴⁶ the publishers of *Fur-Fish-Game* magazine;⁴⁷ and S. Goldstein & Brother, offering furriers' supplies and "complete stocks of furs and skins" including Japanese mink and "Hudson seal."⁴⁸ Another early tenant, A. Rabinowitz & Company, offered "popular priced furs" of muskrat, ocelot, Persian lamb, and raccoon.⁴⁹ George W. Wesley imported and exported skins of Alaska seal, caracul, leopard, ermine, nutria, mink, lynx, Russian sable, and "foxes in all shades."⁵⁰

The Furcraft Building's size and prominence in the Fur District played a role in the 1932 fur workers' strike. Labor historian Philip S. Foner

described it as one of “three skyscraper buildings” at that time containing “80 of the largest shops”; when workers in these buildings “downed their tools and joined the strike” in August of that year, it helped shut down much of the fur business and provided significant momentum to the strike.⁵¹

Henry I. Oser⁵²

The designer of the Furcraft Building, Henry I. Oser, was born around 1864 in Kyiv, Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire) and immigrated to the United States in 1881. He earned a civil engineering degree from Columbia University in 1889, but also passed the bar examination and practiced law until around 1905 when he switched his profession to civil engineer. From 1911 to 1918 he served as assistant engineer for the New York City Department of Buildings, and during World War I oversaw the construction of housing for shipbuilding workers for the Emergency Fleet Corporation.

By 1920, Oser was working independently as a consulting engineer, with an office within the rapidly growing Garment District at 1400 Broadway. Like many developers in the Fur and Garment Districts, Oser was Jewish, and between 1922 and 1928 he designed at least 18 large loft buildings within these areas. In addition to the Furcraft Building and 29th Street Towers (a designated New York City Landmark), Oser designed the neo-Gothic-style Central Building at 191 Joralemon Street (within the Brooklyn Skyscraper Historic District) in 1925. He was a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Oser’s practice appears to have slowed during the Depression, and he retired around 1932. He died in 1935 and is buried with his wife Ophelia in Mount Carmel Cemetery in Glendale, Queens.

The Design of the Furcraft Building

In designing the Furcraft Building, Henry I. Oser

skillfully blended the setback requirements of the 1916 Zoning Resolution with the Neoclassical style, fulfilling the desire of the building’s developers to create a “monument to the progress of the fur trade.”

The Neoclassical style grew out of Chicago’s 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, which stimulated nationwide interest in classical design and ushered in the City Beautiful Movement. During its peak from the mid-1890s to the 1920s, the Neoclassical style was used for practically every type of building, including banks, hotels, government offices, institutions, firehouses, libraries, schools, apartment houses, and churches and synagogues.⁵³ It was also a popular style for skyscrapers during the “Eclectic Period” of skyscraper design of the early 20th century, when architects cloaked skyscrapers in opulent historical ornament, often in the base-shaft-capital arrangement of a classical column. This arrangement, and historical ornament, fell out of favor as the sheer walls of early skyscrapers gave way to the setback massing encouraged by the 1916 Zoning Resolution, and as the “modernistic” Art Deco became the dominant skyscraper style of the mid-to-late 1920s.

Faced in light-colored brick and terra cotta, the Furcraft Building features a classical base with a two-story entrance opening, the building’s only round-arched opening and the facade’s focal point. Within the opening is a bronze enframing composed of pilasters decorated with urns, an address panel crowned by a clock on a scrolled base, blind Roman lattice, anthemion, and a large multi-pane transom. Flanking the entrance is one of the neighborhood’s architectural highlights: two alert foxes, their tails wrapping their bodies, overlooking the entrance from atop tall Corinthian columns. Projecting from a grand rusticated surround crowned by a cartouche and elaborate garlands, these foxes are the most striking and compelling reminders of the industry in the old Fur District.

To each side of the entrance are storefront openings within their original surrounds featuring cartouches and cornices composed of consoles, dentils, foliated corbels, and Vitruvian scrolls. Above the storefronts are large show-window openings in which fur goods would have been displayed. Above the seventh story, the facade steps back dramatically as a series of chamfered, two-story setbacks. Where the setbacks begin, between the eighth and 10th stories, Oser created a secondary decorative focal point, dominated by a two-story terra-cotta Greek temple flanked by buttresses and urns. A tower flanked by plinths crowns the 14th story. Other than minor changes to the tower's openings, and the loss of its stepped roof, the only apparent changes to the main facade are the replacement of its entrance doors, storefront infill, historic show windows, and three-over-three upper-story window sashes.

Now almost a century old, the Furcraft Building appears much as it did on the day it opened in December of 1925. With its monumental presence and prominent fox sculptures, it is uniquely evocative of "Furriers' Street," the Fur District, and New York's leading role in the international fur business during the 20th century.

Later History of the Fur District and the Furcraft Building⁵⁴

Both the Fur District and the Furcraft Building continued to be busy centers of fur production after World War II. In 1947, the building had more than 80 tenants, practically all of whom were involved in the fur business. In 1960, future president John F. Kennedy campaigned in the district, addressing an "enormous meeting of fur workers" after engaging with a crowd extending along Seventh Avenue from West 24th to 30th Streets. Two years later, Kennedy contributed a congratulatory letter to the 50th anniversary publication of the New York Furriers Joint Council, stating, "The Council's political

activity ... which seeks to shape enlightened public policy—has shown that the single Union can have a profound effect on our national life, helping to better it for all Americans."⁵⁵

In 1969, *New York* magazine noted that "roughly 75% of all fur garments ... sold in the United States" were made in the Fur District.⁵⁶ The increasing number of Greek American business owners was reflected in the Furcraft Building's tenant list, which by that time included names such as Artemis Furs, Constantine Furs, and Pappas Brothers alongside those of Jewish proprietors. After opening his first shop in Harlem, the pioneering African American furrier James McQuay moved in 1963 to the Fur District, where he made custom mink, fox, chinchilla, lynx, and coyote garments that were sold to high-end retailers and in his own Seventh Avenue salon.⁵⁷ By 1971, another major African American furrier, Aaron Stewart, had opened two manufacturing shops in the Fur District, designing and manufacturing custom coats for "some of the most famous names in politics, sports, society, and show business."⁵⁸

The fur business received a boost in the 1970s from the increasing numbers of professional self-supporting women who were able to afford their own luxury garments. By the end of the decade, however, the Fur District was beginning its long decline. Between 1979 and 1989, its number of manufacturers fell from 800 to 300, and its number of employees from 3,600 to 1,900.⁵⁹ The Furcraft Building's tenantry reflected this shift, as jewelry manufacturers, entertainment-related businesses, and textile, fabric, and accessories suppliers increasingly replaced fur businesses by the 1980s. From 1985 to 2000, the Furcraft Building was the home of the custom embroidery company Penn & Fletcher, one of Broadway's major costume suppliers.⁶⁰

By the early 1990s, the fur trade was further impacted by animal-rights activism, which included

the “Fur Free Friday” protest on Black Friday of 1993. On that day, 1,500 animal advocates—including the television star Elvira, and a group of drag queens chanting “fur wearing is a drag”—shut down portions of Broadway and Seventh Avenue in the Fur District on the busiest shopping day of the year. The success of the anti-fur movement caused many fashion designers to drop fur garments and accessories from their collections.

By the mid-1990s, fur-related business in the district were being “replaced by a hodgepodge of users, from newspaper publishers to carpet dealers to light fixture makers.”⁶¹ Today, only a handful of furriers remain on 30th Street, and the Furcraft Building houses a variety of commercial tenants.

Conclusion

The Furcraft Building is notable in the Garment District for its distinctive ornament that evokes its historic use. Although no longer a center of fur trade and manufacturing, the Furcraft Building remains its neighborhood’s most-visible monument to an industry with a rich, complex history in which New York once led the world.

Endnotes

¹ Sources for this section include the New York City Department of Taxes Photograph (c. 1938-1943), Municipal Archives; and the New York City Department of Buildings Block and Lot folder for Manhattan Block 779, Lot 66 (Municipal Archives). New Building application 63-1925 within this folder contains an architectural rendering of its main facade, and taxation information within the folder includes an additional “tax photo” taken looking west.

² Sources for this section include Elaine S. Abelson and Cathy Matson, “Furs,” in Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City, Second Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 487-88; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11-23; and “Astor, John Jacob,” in Allen Johnson, Ed., *Dictionary of American Biography, Volume I* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 397-98.

³ John B. Pine, Ed., *Seal and Flag of the City of New York* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915), 27.

⁴ This section is adapted from text written by Jessica Fletcher for LPC, *Lefcourt Clothing Center Designation Report (LP-2691)* (New York: City of New York, 2025).

⁵ *Archaeological Documentary Study No. 7 Line Extension/Hudson Yard Rezoning* (New York: New York City Transit and New York City Department of City Planning, 2004), III A-5. Robert S. Grumet notes the difficulty of assigning names to Indigenous groups because these names have been historically unstable. He uses the term Munsee to refer to the Delaware-speaking people who lived in this region and notes that the term “Munsee” refers to the specific dialect they spoke and was only introduced to refer to this group after 1727 in a period of mass dislocation from their ancestral lands by colonists. Robert S. Grumet, *The Munsee Indians: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009) 3-4 and 13-14.

⁶ *Archaeological Documentary Study 44th Street and Eleventh Avenue* (New York: New York City Transit and New York City Department of City Planning, 2008), 7.

⁷ *Archaeological Documentary Study No. 7 Line Extension/Hudson Yard Rezoning*, III C-1-3. An 1815 map shows the division of this farmland and the presence of a

few estates throughout the future Garment District, *Maps of Farms Commonly Called the Blue Book, 1815: Drawn From the Original on File in the Street Commissioner’s Office in the City of New York* (New York: City of New York, 1868), plate 5. Although colonists forcibly dislocated the Munsee from the area, present-day descendants live among the Federally and State Recognized Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohicans, the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe of Indians, the Shinnecock Nation, and the Unkechaug Nation.

⁸ Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 203-4.

⁹ The Tenderloin’s boundaries expanded over time west to Eighth Avenue and north to Central Park. Landmarks Preservation Commission, *51 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley Designation Report (LP-2628)*, prepared by Sarah Moses (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2019), 13.

¹⁰ Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 206-7; 1880 United States Census, New York, Manhattan, Enumeration District 404, and 1900 United States Census, New York, Manhattan, Enumeration District 306.

¹¹ Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 12; and Mike Wallace, *Greater Gotham: A History of New York City From 1898 to 1919* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 452 and 811.

¹² Within this broad category of working-class, African American residents of the Tenderloin had varying degrees of financial stability, and some lived in poverty. The historian Cheryl D. Hicks uses the terms working-class and impoverished when describing Black Tenderloin residents, see Cheryl D. Hicks, *Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 56. Mike Wallace notes the concentration of the Black population around Seventh Avenue in the lower West 30s; Wallace, *Greater Gotham*, 269.

¹³ Hilary Ballon, *New York’s Pennsylvania Stations* (New York: Norton, 2002), 35.

¹⁴ This section is adapted from text written by Matthew A. Postal for the *Fashion Tower Designation Report (LP-2688)* (New York: City of New York, 2025).

¹⁵ This section is primarily based on Anthony Robins, National Register Nomination for Garment Center Historic District (2008); Andrew S. Dolkart, “Fabric of New York City’s Garment District,” *Buildings & Landscapes* (Spring 2011); and “Urban Fabric: Building New York’s Garment District,” virtual exhibit, Skyscraper Museum (2012-13), curated by Dolkart.

¹⁶ In 1914 there were as many as 654 factories within a block of Fifth Avenue. See “Forcing Factories From Fifth Avenue,” *The Sun*, April 1914.

¹⁷ Building Zone Resolution, 1916, see: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/about/city-planning-history/zr1916.pdf>.

¹⁸ “Create Garment Center of America,” *Women’s Wear*, December 8, 1919, 2-3.

¹⁹ Sources for this section include “War Hits Fur Trade,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1915; “Suggest Renaming Seventh Avenue,” *New York Times*, July 8, 1917; A. L. Belden, *The Fur Trade of America and Some of the Men Who Made and Maintain It* (New York: Peltries Publishing Company, 1917); Agnes C. Laut, *The Fur Trade of America* (New York: Macmillan, 1921); “United States and Canada Control Fur Trade,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 1921, 9; “Record Year for Fur Dressers and Dyers,” *Fur Trade Review* (April 1922), 193-94; and Richard Price Buckmaster, “New York Fur Centre of the World,” *The American Furrier* (October 1922), 32-33.

²⁰ “World’s Fur Trade,” *The Buffalo Commercial*, July 2, 1900, 4. Leipzig’s position had much to do with German companies’ leadership in manufacturing and developing the chemicals used in these processes.

²¹ Advertisement, Raw Fur Merchants’ Association, *Hunter-Trader-Trapper* (June 1916), 97

²² Advertisement, H. Jaekel & Sons, *Harper’s Bazaar* (November 1916).

²³ “Suggest Renaming Seventh Avenue.”

²⁴ “Fur Trade Moving to Seventh Avenue,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1919; “Suggest Renaming Seventh Avenue.”

²⁵ “The Fifth Largest Industry in New York,” *Fur Trade Review*, July 1922, 80. “New York, a Fur Centre,” *Edison Monthly*, January 1922, 4-6.

²⁶ At the time, the overwhelming majority of animals used in fur garments had been caught in steel traps, which, advocates argued, essentially tortured them to death. Animal advocates campaigned for a shift from fur

trapping toward farming, which they considered more humane, and despite initial resistance from the industry, dozens of American fur farms, and more than 1,000 Canadian fur farms, existed by the early 1920s. In 1921, the director of the New York Zoological Society, William T. Hornaday, castigated the fur “craze,” warning of its potential for exterminating most of the country’s fur-bearing animal species. “William T. Hornaday Berates the Fur Trade,” *Fur Trade Review*, 1921, 149.

²⁷ Federal Writers’ Project, *New York City Guide* (New York: Random House, 1939), 163.

²⁸ Sources for this section include Jack Hardy, *The Clothing Workers* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 116-48; Robert D. Leiter, “The Fur Workers Union,” *ILR Review* (January 1950), 163-86; Philip Foner, *The Fur and Leather Workers Union: A Story of Dramatic Struggles and Achievements* (Newark, N.J.: Nordan Press, 1950); and Bernard Weinstein, *The Jewish Unions in America* (Cambridge, UK: OpenBook Publishers, 2018), 253-65.

²⁹ Weinstein, 255.

³⁰ According to labor historian Eric Arensen, “Discriminatory white unions ... were ubiquitous in pre-World War II America.” Eric Arensen, “Civil Rights and the Labor Movement: A Historical Overview,” International Brotherhood of Teamsters website (<https://teamster.org/2021/02/civil-rights-and-the-labor-movement-a-historical-overview/>), accessed May 14, 2025.

³¹ Leiter, 175.

³² Leiter, 163.

³³ Victor R. Fuchs, *The Economics of the Fur Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

³⁴ Furriers Joint Council of New York, *50 Years of Progress: 1912/1962* (New York: 1962?), 42.

³⁵ These buildings are visible on G. W. Bromley & Co., *Atlas of the Borough of Manhattan, City of New York* (Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley & Co., 1921), plate 54. Despite its 1921 publication date, this map was updated to 1923.

³⁶ “Latest Dealings in Realty Field,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1924; “Building for Fur Trade Planned for 30th Street,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 24, 1924; “Plan \$800,000 Loft for Fur District,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 28, 1924, 6E; “New 14-Story Building for the Fur Trade,” *Women’s Wear*, December 24, 1924, 20.

³⁷ Demolition records, Department of Buildings Block and Lot folder for Manhattan Block 779, Lot 66 (New York City Municipal Archives); “Latest Activities in Real Estate and Building Fields in the City and Suburban Area,” *New York Sun*, April 25, 1925, 20.

³⁸ “Millions of Dollars Going Into Lofts and Apartments,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1925, RE1.

³⁹ “Striking Changes in the Fur District,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1924.

⁴⁰ “Ask Us Another!—‘Fur’ Instance,” *Fur Trade Review* (April 1927), 51, 164.

⁴¹ “New Fur Craft Building,” *Fur Trade Review* (September 1925), 167. Department of Buildings records show Gerson Sack as President of the Furcraft Realty Company, and Jack Citron as its Treasurer. According to “Building for Fur Trade Planned for 30th Street,” the directors were H. B. Schillinger, I. Steinberg, and attorney S. N. Freedman. Directories show Sack as a partner in the fur-related firm of Sack & Bernstein at least as early as 1904. *Trow Copartnership and Corporation Directory of the Boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx* (New York: Trow, 1904), 532.

⁴² Advertisement, *Fur Trade Review* (September 1925), 169.

⁴³ Department of Buildings Block and Lot folder. In granting the variance, the Board noted that “the front windows on the first two stories are to be used for the display of merchandise, [and] that to sub-divide them into small sections would defeat this purpose.” The justification for the variance included the building’s fireproof quality, including its sprinkler system and fireproof interior staircases, on the condition that “all openings shall be equipped with approved metal frames and sash and glazed with polished plate glass not less than one-quarter inch in thickness, and that the requirements of the labor law shall be complied with in all other respects.”

⁴⁴ Department of Buildings block and lot folder.

⁴⁵ “Enlarges Midtown Realty Holdings,” *New York Evening Post*, August 9, 1926.

⁴⁶ Advertisement, *Fur Journal* (September 1927).

⁴⁷ *Fur-Fish-Game* (September 1926).

⁴⁸ Advertisement, *Fur Age Monthly* (August 1926).

⁴⁹ Advertisement, *Fur Journal* (July 1928).

⁵⁰ Advertisement, *Fur Trade Review* (March 1930).

⁵¹ Foner, 375.

⁵² “Manhattan New Building Database, 1900-1986,” Office for Metropolitan History (MetroHistory.com), accessed July 27, 2001; Obituary, *New York Times* (March 21, 1935), 23; LPC, *Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District Designation Report* (LP-2449), Report by Christopher D. Brazee, 52; United States Census (1910 and 1920) and New York State Census (1905, 1915, and 1925); New York City Directories, 1900-1923.

⁵³ Neoclassical-style buildings of diverse types designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission include the East River Savings Bank (Walker & Gillette, 1926-27) at 743 Amsterdam Avenue in Manhattan; the Pierre Hotel (Schultze & Weaver, 1929-30) within the Upper East Side Historic District; the Brooklyn Municipal Building (McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, 1923-26), within the Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District; the New York School of Applied Design for Women (Pell & Corbett, 1908-09) at 160 Lexington Avenue in Manhattan; Engine Company 73 and Hook & Ladder Company 42 (Hoppin & Koen, 1912) at 659 Prospect Avenue in the Bronx; the New York Public Library Chatham Square Branch (McKim, Mead & White, 1903) at 33 East Broadway in Manhattan; the Surrey Apartments (Schwartz & Gross, 1925-26), within the Upper East Side Historic District; and the Congregation of Edes Israel Anshei Mesrich (Hermann Horenburger, 1910), within the East Village/Lower East Side Historic District.

⁵⁴ Sources for this section include Furriers Joint Council of New York, *50 Years of Progress: 1912/1962* (New York: 1962?); Ezra Bowen, “Mink for a Day,” *New York Magazine* (March 31, 1969), 44-47; Woody Hochswender, “As the Image of Fur Suffers, So Does Profit,” *New York Times*, March 14, 1989, A1; John F. Burns, “Fur Industry Shrinking With No End in Sight,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1991, D1; Eric Wilson, “Animal Rights Parade Protests Fashion Fur-vor,” *Newsday*, November 27, 1993; David Friedman, “Adventures in the Skin Trade,” *Newsday*, December 7, 1994; “Fur Trade Wanes, but Its Cradle Finds New Life,” *New York Times*, October 8, 1995; Terry Pristin, “Just as Fur Was Getting Hot, Busy Season Turned Balmy,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2002, B1; and Manhattan Address Telephone Directories (New York: New York Telephone Company), April 1936; March 1947; December 1950; December 1953; 1957; January 1962; January 1966; January 1969; June 1975; and July 1980.

⁵⁵ *50 Years of Progress*, 5, 41.

⁵⁶ Bowen, 44.

⁵⁷ On McQuay, see “Black Designer Talks About Fur; It Purrs,” *Chicago Defender*, January 17, 1973; “Fondle

Them in Fur, and Listen to Them Purr,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 25, 1975; Renee Minus White, “Focus on Fashion,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 27, 1977; “The Nation’s Only Black Furrier,” *New Journal and Guide*, December 30, 1981; and “A Furrier for All Seasons,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 1, 1982.

⁵⁸ Sara Slack, “Talented and Black: Youthful Furrier Creates to Please Each Individual,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 28, 1971.

⁵⁹ Hochswender. Although the trend toward offshore manufacturing mirrored that of the Garment District, the

popularization of furs sold through television commercials at bargain prices, was uniquely damaging to local fur manufacturing. While the United States remained the world’s largest mink supplier, most of its pelts were now being exported to Asia, where they were manufactured into finished garments that returned to the U.S. for sale.

⁶⁰ Triffin I. Morris, *A History of the Theatre Costume Business* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 142.

⁶¹ “Fur Trade Wanes, But Its Cradle Finds New Life.”

Findings and Designation

Furcraft Building

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Furcraft 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, state, and the nation.

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 Furcraft Building and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 779, Lot 66 as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.



Furcraft Building, 242-246 West 30th Street, Manhattan
LPC, August 2025



Base, including main entrance and storefronts
LPC, August 2025



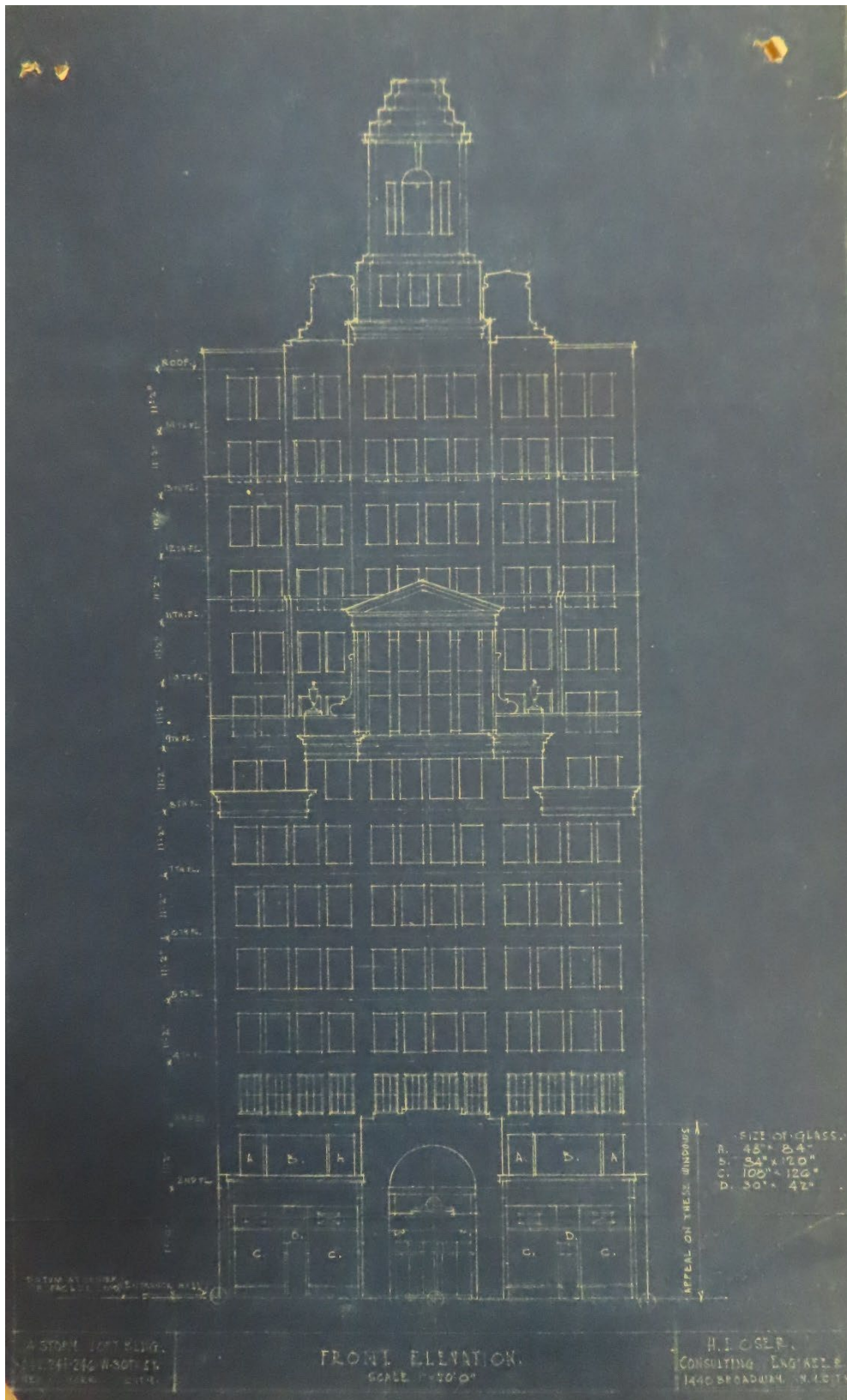
Upper-story detail, including 9th- and 10th-story Greek temple
LPC, August 2025



Main and east facades
LPC, August 2025



West facade
LPC, August 2025



Main facade rendering by Henry I. Oser, New York City Municipal Archives



New York City Department of Taxes photograph, c. 1938-43, New York City Municipal Archives

