

Landmarks Preservation Commission
September 6, 1988; Designation List 209
LP-1541

GERMANIA LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY BUILDING (now Guardian Life Building), 50 Union Square East, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1910-11; architect, D'Oench & Yost; builder, Charles T. Wills, Inc.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 873, Lot 1 in part consisting of the western portion of the lot, which is approximately 80 feet by 115 feet, on which the described building is situated.

On May 14, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Guardian Life Building (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Thirty-two witnesses spoke in favor of designation; two witnesses spoke in opposition on behalf of the owner. The hearing was continued to September 17, 1985 (Item No. 2); seven witnesses spoke in favor of designation, and one witness spoke on behalf of the owner in opposition. The Commission received several letters in support of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

This twenty-story commercial building, crowned by an early and impressive example of modern signage, was designed by the architectural firm of D'Oench & Yost and built in 1910-11 as the national headquarters for the Germania Life Insurance Company of New York (now The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America, the continuation of the original firm). The building is a tripartite columnar skyscraper which incorporates in its design motifs from traditional European architecture, most prominently the grand four-story mansard roof with varied dormer windows. The mansard roof and other features tie the building's design to French architecture, both the Second Empire style and the modern French mode that dominated Parisian architecture of the 1890s. By employing the mansard, D'Oench & Yost alluded to a mansarded building that previously housed the company, thus continuing an architectural tradition which began around 1870 and conveyed a sound public image. The Germania Life Insurance Company Building (now Guardian Life Building) is prominently located on a corner site visible from Union Square and, together with the monumental Everett Building directly across the avenue, forms an imposing terminus to Park Avenue South.

The Development of Union Square

The Commissioners Map of 1807-11, which first laid out the grid plan of Manhattan above Houston Street, allowed for certain existing thoroughfares to retain their original configuration. Bloomingdale Road, (now Broadway), and the Bowery intersected at 16th Street. The acute angle formed by this "union" was set aside by the Commissioners and named Union Place.¹ Initially Union Place extended from 10th to 17th Streets, on land owned by Manhattan Bank.

It then presented to the eye of the tourist and pedestrian a shapeless and ill-looking collection of lots, where garden sauce flourished -- devoid of symmetry, and around which were reared a miserable group of shanties.²

In 1815, the state legislature reduced the size of Union Place by making 14th Street its southern boundary.³ As the city expanded northward and land use intensified, the need for open spaces became apparent. A report drafted by the street committee in 1831 states the need for public squares "for purposes of military, and civic parades, and festivities, and ... to serve as ventilators to a densely populated city."⁴ Designated a public space in 1832 at the urging of local residents, additional land was acquired so that the area could be regularized.⁵ Graded, paved, and fenced, Union Place was finally opened to the public in July, 1839. Throughout much of its history, the square has been used for public gatherings, political rallies, and demonstrations.⁶

By the 1850s, Union Square (as it came to be known) was completely surrounded by buildings, including some of the city's most splendid mansions; but, "already by 1860, the dramatic march of commerce had begun."⁷ Theaters, hotels, and luxury retailers predominated in the 1870s.⁸ By the 1890s, the vestiges of the fashionable residential area, as well as the elegant stores and theaters, had been supplanted on Union Square by taller buildings that catered to the needs of publishers and manufacturers who had moved uptown.⁹

The Germania (now Guardian) Life Building is prominently situated on the northeast corner of East 17th Street and Union Square East, at the base of Park Avenue South (then called Fourth Avenue). Stations for major subway, surface, and "El" lines were close to the site, which was characterized by Real Estate Record and Guide in 1908 as "one of the most accessible locations for modern office buildings in the city."¹⁰ By September, 1910, about seventeen new loft and office buildings (generally restricted to office and salesroom needs, as opposed to manufacturing) had been erected, conveniently located near hotels and transportation.¹¹

Larger than the late nineteenth-century buildings on Union Square West, the new loft and office buildings, such as the Germania Life Insurance Company Building, altered the scale of structures on the square's northern and southern ends and formed the core of a new mercantile district developed as an economical alternative to the commercial district along lower Fifth Avenue.

Announcement of the selection of D'Oench & Yost to prepare plans for a new headquarters for what was then Germania Life appeared in Real Estate Record and Guide. In March 1910, an announcement of the architects' intention to build a twenty-story brick and stone office building appeared in the same publication, as did a statement that Chas. T. Wills, Inc. had received the general contract to erect the new building.¹²

The Germania Life Insurance Company¹³

"Regard for the safety of the assured" was the guiding principle of the Germania (now The Guardian) Life Insurance Company.¹⁴ Founded on the "trinity" of net reserve valuations (adequate reserves mathematically calculated), non-forfeiture of policies, and cash values for policies before such requirements legally existed, the Germania Life Insurance Company of New York received permission to operate in July of 1860. Anti-German sentiment during World War I induced the owners to change its name to Guardian Life Insurance Company of America in 1918.¹⁵

The firm's founder and first president (1860-1897), Hugo Wesendonck, a graduate of the University of Bonn who studied law at the University of Berlin and was admitted to the bar in Dusseldorf, was a liberal member of the Frankfurt Parliament. Sentenced to death when the Revolution of 1848 failed, Wesendonck fled to the United States with other liberals. Wesendonck entered the silk business in Philadelphia. He then decided that he wanted "to bring the benefits of life insurance to the 'little people' of German extraction."¹⁶ After \$200,000 in capital was subscribed, the company was incorporated on April 10, 1860. The capital was divided into 4,000 shares at a par value of \$50 each. The company was established as a "mixed" company, an arrangement which entitled stockholders to one vote for each share of stock; policyholders could vote if they paid at least \$100 in premiums or if they were entitled to an annuity from the company of at least \$100. In 1901, a further provision insured one vote for each \$100 of legal reserve upon their respective policies.

In 1868 -- the year of the firm's first distribution of profits -- Germania became the first American insurance company to start an agency in Europe, and in 1876, the company purchased an office building at 12 Leipziger Platz in Berlin. By 1880, over 25 percent of the firm's business was done outside the United

States and Canada. The company continued to flourish and maintain a reputation for the ethical conduct of its business. King's Handbook of 1893 commented upon "the economical and successful administration of the company's affairs," noting also that the company's Board of Directors "is formed of eminent merchants, public spirited citizens of New York."¹⁷ In 1905, the Armstrong Investigation prompted many reforms in the insurance business but the committee did not require Germania Life to institute any changes in its practices. Noted "for its well-defined policy of moderate but steady growth without extravagance or waste and its absolute freedom from any speculative or other objectionable practice," The Surveyor, an insurance journal, on the occasion of Germania Life's fiftieth anniversary, pronounced the company "the only American life insurance company which has complied uninterruptedly with all the rigorous requirements of the laws of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland."¹⁸

The company occupied three successive headquarters on Broadway. In 1864, the company -- which already had agencies in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago and Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Buffalo, St. Paul, Norwich, Connecticut, and Bloomfield, Illinois and other cities -- outgrew its first office at 90 Broadway and moved into larger offices at 293 Broadway. In 1884, after occupying a third Broadway location, the company felt financially able to purchase a building for its home office on Nassau Street which was sold in 1909. The company's new twenty-story office building on Union Square, constructed at a cost of one million dollars and designed by D'Oench & Yost, was occupied on April 24, 1911.¹⁹

D'Oench and Yost²⁰

The firm of D'Oench & Yost was formed in 1900 by Albert Frederick D'Oench (1852-1918) and Joseph Warren Yost (1847-1923).²¹ Born in St. Louis, Missouri, D'Oench attended Washington University, receiving an M. E. in 1872. D'Oench later studied architecture at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, New York and at the Royal Polytechnic Institute, Stuttgart, Germany, graduating from the latter in 1875. After traveling in Germany, France, and England, he settled in New York City and was employed for several years in the offices of Leopold Eidlitz, Richard M. Hunt, and Edward E. Raht.²² D'Oench's career as an independent architect began in 1881, but in the second administration of Mayor William R. Grace he was appointed Superintendent of Buildings of the City of New York. In this capacity, he suggested the use of hollow brick as an integral part of the bearing walls of buildings, and in a revision of the building code of 1887, this form of construction was permitted. After resigning this position in March, 1889, he formed the partnership of D'Oench & Simon with Bernhard Simon. D'Oench & Simon gradually acquired a

large architectural practice, designing country and city houses (including decorations and furnishings), mercantile buildings, fire patrol houses and apartment houses.²³ In 1900, D'Oench and Joseph Warren Yost formed the firm of D'Oench & Yost.

D'Oench was a fellow of the American Institute of Architects (hereafter AIA), a member of the New York Chapter of the AIA and of the Architectural League of New York; he retired from active professional work in 1916. A significant factor in the selection of D'Oench & Yost to design the Germania Life Building may have been D'Oench's membership on the Board of Directors of Germania Life when the commission was awarded,²⁴ a connection that is not surprising in light of his German heritage.

D'Oench's partner from 1900 on, Joseph Warren Yost (1847-1923) was born near Clarrington, Ohio. At thirteen, he received a certificate to teach. He attended Harlem College in 1864 and Mt. Union College in 1866-68. After teaching school for one term, he studied mechanics, civil engineering and architecture, supporting himself as a house painter and decorator. In 1870, he began practicing architecture at Bellaire, Ohio; nine years later he turned to architecture exclusively. In 1882, Yost moved to Columbus, Ohio; his architectural practice soon became the most extensive in the state.²⁵ His early works include: the courthouses at Troy, St. Clairesville, and Cambridge; the Children's homes at Barnesville, Zanesville, and Newark; the high schools at Troy, Barnesville, and Newark; the colleges, University Hall at Delaware; Doane Academy at Granville; and Orton Hall at Columbus, and the State Hospital at Gallipolis. His most important work was the enlargement of the Ohio Capitol. During the years 1891-98, he headed the firm of Yost & Packard, of Columbus. Yost was a prominent member of the Western Association of Architects, and in 1885, he was instrumental in organizing the Ohio Association of Architects, of which he served as president (1895-96).²⁶ In 1888, he became a Fellow of the AIA.²⁷

D'Oench & Yost's other notable works included: the Tilden Building (at 105 West 40th St), and an addition to the Tribune Building (154 Nassau Street),²⁸ of which Richard Morris Hunt was the original architect. The firm also designed library buildings, as well as a number of large apartment houses and commercial structures in New York.

The Design of the Building

The design of the Germania (now Guardian) Life Building is dominated by the four-story mansard roof (the building's most pronounced feature)²⁹ with its varied dormer windows, the escutcheons at the top of the transitional story, and the

garlanded keystones which tie the building's design to French architecture and the modern French mode that dominated Parisian architecture in the 1890s. Given the numbers of Americans who studied abroad at the time, including D'Oench, the style -- also known as "The Cartouche Style" due to "its extensive use of that particular ornamental device as well as swags, garlands, festoons and a host of other overscaled motifs to enrich the facade"-- had an inevitable transatlantic influence.³⁰

The mansard roof on the Germania (now Guardian) Life Building also harks back to the Second Empire style, which was first introduced into American architecture at mid-century.³¹ Other New York office buildings also employed the mansard roof, a picturesque feature which often contained a building's upper stories and thus concealed a building's full height.³² George B. Post employed the mansard roof in the Western Union Telegraph Building (1872-75, often viewed as one of the first skyscrapers), and in the Union Trust Building (1889-1890). In his design for the Washington Life Building, Cyrus Eidlitz utilized the mansard. Similarly, Cass Gilbert's West Street Building (completed in 1905) features a mansard roof.

D'Oench & Yost were also familiar with the French idiom as a result of their employment to design the addition to Richard Morris Hunt's Tribune Building (1903-05), the most notable of Hunt's commercial structures which was crowned by a mansard roof from the first (1873-76, 1881-83, 1903-05, no longer extant), and which, by some definitions, was one of the first skyscrapers built.³³ (Connections established during the period that D'Oench worked for Hunt may have helped his firm to secure this commission.³⁴) Because the three upper stories (two of them at the mansard roof level) were tied together by the granite window trim, the verticality of the mansard was enhanced. The building's vertical elements were also accentuated by the prominent dormer pediments which capped the vertical bays sharing the facade with the tower.³⁵

Like the Tribune Building, Germania (now Guardian) Life is given vertical emphasis, enhanced by the building's roofline embellishments. Given the centrality of height to the definition of the skyscraper, it is particularly important that one of the parallels that may be drawn between the D'Oench & Yost and the Hunt building concerns their shared accentuation of that very concept.³⁶ Its mansard has from the start borne a sign bearing the company's name. A photograph published only shortly after the building's completion reveals that, initially, a sign reading "Germania Life" topped the building.³⁷ After the company changed its name, the sign was changed; it currently reads "Guardian Life." The placement of this sign on the French mansard embodies the fusion of traditional and modern elements in one design.

Importantly, D'Oench & Yost are alluding to an earlier building that housed the company. Beginning in the early 1870s, a conscious desire to create an architecture reflective of modernized business practices arose.³⁸ In control of large amounts of capital, insurance leaders wielded tremendous power; moreover, it has been observed that "more innovations were introduced in life insurance at this time than in any of the other [financial] intermediaries."³⁹ A firm endeavored to inculcate in the public mind "not only its name but also a favorable impression of its operations."⁴⁰ Press and pamphlet literature were key aids, but also of great importance was the architecture of home office and branch buildings. Guide books of the period remarked on the symbiotic relationship of these prosperous insurance firms and the economic and architectural flourishing of New York City:

Beside their benevolent work, these life corporations have been among the prime causes of the city's architectural growth, for the life insurance buildings of New York surpass the office structures of any city in the world. Life insurance is indeed one of the vital features of modern life, in which New York City alone leads any nation on the face of the earth.⁴¹

The insurance industry, in particular The Equitable Life Assurance Society, was a leader in the creation of the tall office building.⁴² Designed by Arthur Gilman and Edward H. Kendall with George B. Post, The Equitable Building (1868-70) was the first tall building to incorporate passenger elevators; the top floors thus became desirable and could serve as rental properties, a new use for the vast capital reservoirs of the insurance industry. Moreover, the inclusion of the mansard roof coupled with the building's height established an architectural "company imagery." Gibbs, in his analysis of American business architecture, suggests that these innovations in height, technical equipment and style were intended to convey stability, standing and reputation, strength, and an image of the best institutions.⁴³

This new imagery was not lost on other insurance companies located in New York, among them Germania Life, at the time a neighbor of Equitable Life's. During the 1870s, an ornate mansard French roof was added to Germania's otherwise simple Italianate building.⁴⁴ This addition exemplified both flattery by virtue of emulation and competition, "personal pride and company boosterism," (which was particular keen at this time) manifesting itself in architecture.⁴⁵

By including a prominent mansard in their design for Germania's corporate headquarters (constructed during the company's fiftieth anniversary year), D'Oench & Yost allude to the precedent established by the firm's earlier corporate building. D'Oench & Yost's building certainly conveyed the solid appearance of an "institution", with the new overtones of "civic" virtue that now applied to commercial architecture as well.⁴⁶

It is also possible to see references to Germanic architecture in the Germania (now Guardian) Life Building, references which are understandable in light of D'Oench's German heritage and Germania Life's strong ties to Germany. The employment of different dormers which vary from story to story may be an allusion to the use, in sixteenth-century German architecture, of orders used on five or six stories, one above the other. Moreover the arrangement of the dormers on the Park Avenue South facade of the mansard may be related to the tall fenestrated multi-story gable, ascending in stages -- with scrolls, strapwork, and other ornate decoration -- that characterized sixteenth-century German structures. In addition, at Aschaffenburg Castle, each corner features a tower with a shaft that is topped both by a balustrade which is reminiscent of the cornice originally featured above the sixteenth story of Germania (now Guardian) Life and by a shaped roof; these towers bear comparison with Germania (now Guardian) Life.⁴⁷

In their design for the Germania (now Guardian) Life Building, D'Oench & Yost approached the skyscraper as a classical column. Based on the analogy between a building's elevation and the base, shaft, and capital of the column, this tripartite scheme, which had "largely ceased to be experimental," was summarized by Montgomery Schuyler in 1899.⁴⁸ The Germania (now Guardian) Life Building is comprised of a rusticated base, a two-story transitional section, a twelve-story shaft, capped by another two-story transitional section, and a "capital," the four-story mansard. Employing the columnar skyscraper formula enabled D'Oench & Yost to fuse traditional stylistic elements derived from European architecture with the dictates of the skyscraper, a distinctly modern and urban building type, as they were being realized at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.

Germania (now Guardian) Life and The "New Architecture"

Despite the traditional elements of the Germania (now Guardian) Life Building's design and the employment of a masonry exterior (rather than a metal skeleton sheathed in fire-resistant terra-cotta), its interior construction nonetheless shared attributes with what A. C. David, termed "The New Architecture: The First American Type of Real Value."⁴⁹

Although not "thoroughly contemporary" in the stylistic design of its exterior, the Germania (now Guardian) Life Building shared some attributes with the commercial and office architecture identified by David in his article of 1910. Designed by a firm not especially known for other types of architecture, this strictly commercial building was designed for and owned by the the firm that would occupy it. The design incorporated practical considerations. The architects provided for a maximum amount of clear and usable floor space flooded by natural light; a corner site, such as that occupied by Germania (now Guardian) Life, was especially desirable for these reasons. The building also fulfilled the exactions of the insurance companies, stipulations which were designed to satisfy the Board of Fire Underwriters. According to an article in Architecture and Building, in the Germania Life Building, the White system of fireproof floor construction was employed, and the columns were fireproofed with terra-cotta blocks.⁵⁰ The building's fire-protective equipment consisted of two lines of 6-inch standpipes, with hose and reel attachments on every floor; in addition, chemical extinguishers could be found throughout the building.⁵¹ D'Oench & Yost provided for five passenger elevators and three freight elevators. Their plans also featured two enclosed hallways and two flights of enclosed stairs.⁵²

The Germania (now Guardian) Life Building was modern in its method of construction. The vertical loads transmitted through riveted steel I-shaped section columns are supported on grillage composed of two and three tiers of steel I-beams. In general up to the fourth story, steel plate-girders are employed; in the stories above, 24-inch heavy I-beams with bottom and top reinforcing flange plates are used. Two rows of wind-bracing systems consisting of steel-plate girders 2 feet 6 inches and 3 feet deep were utilized.⁵³

Description

Prominently situated on the northeast corner of East 17th Street and Park Avenue South, the Germania (now Guardian) Life Building is a twenty-story office building with a basement and sub-basement.⁵⁴ According to the New Building Application, the building conforms to the original lot lines being 80'x 115'.⁵⁵ Curtain wall construction is employed. The foundation walls are built of brick in Portland cement and mortar; the upper walls are constructed of granite and brick. The materials for the elevations are brick and granite; the mansard roof is covered in vitrified tile. According to the New Building application, the architects considered the main roof to be flat and surmounted by the four upper stories that comprise the mansard.⁵⁶

The two-story base of the Germania (now Guardian) Life Building is rusticated with deep horizontal scoring. On the lower half of the base (or the first story), windows topped by segmental arches with foliated console-like keystones and pronounced voussoirs that merge with the coursing appear. A pronounced belt-course with dolphin-headed waterspouts separates this first story from the upper part of the base. The main entrance, which is treated in a manner similar to the window apertures with deep scoring, pronounced voussoirs which merge with the scoring and a foliated console-like keystone, appears at the extreme left of the Park Avenue South facade. The upper half of the base has less pronounced coursing and is characterized by round-arched apertures flanked by smaller fenestration. On the East 17th Street elevation, three double-height round-arched windows are flanked by pairs of smaller windows. The upper and lower windows are square-headed; those below are topped by tympana embellished by scallop-shell motifs. Consoles draped by garlands join the tympana of the lower windows with the square-headed apertures above. On the Park Avenue South facade, a double-height round-arched window is bisected by a cast-iron balcony bearing the initials "G" and "L" for Germania Life. This window is flanked by a pair of vertically aligned narrow rectangular windows on either side; panels ornamented by garlands appear between these two windows. These windows are in turn flanked by pairs of windows resembling those on the East 17th-Street elevation.

The base is capped by a continuous stone balustrade embellished by recessed panels bearing rosettes and supported by foliated brackets, which is indented at the East 17th Street and Park Avenue South corner. The stone balustrade serves as a transition to the twelve-story shaft. Horizontal rectangles are applied to the shaft and give it the appearance of light rustication. Above the third story on both the Park Avenue South and East 17th Street elevations, the company name appears. On the Park Avenue South facade, on the fourth through the fourteenth stories a group of three square-headed, one-over-one windows united by a continuous pronounced stone sill is flanked by two similar windows on either side. On the East 17th Street elevation, on the fourth through the fourteenth stories three central pairs of square-headed windows are each joined by a pronounced stone sill; these three pairs are flanked by two square-headed windows on either side.

A group of protruding stone sills indicates the beginning of a two-story transition which separates the shaft from the building's "crown". On the first of these two stories, sections corresponding to piers are ornamented by recessed panels bearing escutcheons flanked by torches. Sections of wall between windows are ornamented by bell-flowers topped by lion's heads all set

within recessed panels. This lower half of the transitional section is bracketed by two groups of moldings that constitute cornices. The second transitional story has austere square-headed windows topped by a molding of applied bezants and by a dentilled cornice.

A dentilled cornice demarcates the crown, a four-story mansard roof, which features a variety of neo-classic one-over-one dormer windows. On the Park Avenue South elevation, a central group of three windows each of which is topped by a scallop (a motif that is reiterative of those on the base), is capped by a parapet embellished by a motif resembling a swag of fabric. One pair of square-headed windows topped by scallops and similarly joined by a parapet is found on each side of this central group. On the East 17th Street elevation, three groups of three windows with scallops above only the central window are flanked, on either side, by paired windows, each of which is topped by a scallop. On the second story of the Park Avenue South elevation, a central group of three square-headed windows topped by several moldings and a parapet is flanked by single wide dormers with segmental pediments. On the East 17th Street elevation, three groups of three windows (a central wide aperture flanked by narrower openings) are flanked, on either side, by single windows like those on Park Avenue South. The central second-story windows on the East 17th Street facade are topped by acroteria at the center and at the corners. The third row of windows are one-over-ones with triangular pediments. With the exception of the outer two windows on each elevation, which are placed at the outer edges of the pediments below, on the Park Avenue South elevation, a central group of three (one wider aperture flanked by two narrower openings) is aligned with the central windows groupings below. On the East 17th-street facade, windows topped by triangular pediments are placed at the outer edges of each of the central window groupings below. At the fourth level, round-arched one-over-one windows topped by acroteria are located at the midpoint of the windows or window groupings below. This top level of windows merges into a decorative band that fuses with the parapet atop the roof. Stylized ribs alternate with torch balusters that extend above the railing; escutcheons are featured at the corners and terminate the articulation that begins at the juncture of the cornice and the roof. Acroteria appear at the corners. The roof is covered by terra-cotta tile and crowned by a large sign spelling out the firm's name. The sign reads "Guardian Life" spelled out in twelve bold, block letters; the G and the L being larger in height. The sign, which is mounted on a metal armature, spans the length of the elevation contained within the raised parapet. Comparison of the existing sign with photographs of the original indicates that the majority of the letters were reused, with the U and the D being new. The letters now have applied red

neon tubes. Fittingly, the building continues to serve as headquarters for The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America.

The building's original one-over-one windows are set in copper-clad frames and have wood sash. On the interior, the glass has been coated with an energy-conserving, protective film.⁵⁷ In 1940, a metal cornice at the sixteenth floor was removed; a flat sheet metal fascia was installed. In 1957, new store fronts were added and the original revolving entrance doors were replaced with new Herculite doors. Skidmore, Owings and Merrill designed an addition to the rear (completed in 1961, it is not included within the designation).⁵⁸ The westernmost bay on the East 17th Street elevation features an automated banking center with a non-retractible sign above it, and the southernmost bay on the Park Avenue South facade also features a similar non-retractible sign.

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NOTES

1. I. N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909 vol. 5 (New York, 1915), s.v. 1808.
2. David Thomas Valentine, ed., Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York (New York, 1857), 480.
3. Stokes, s.v. 1815 Apr. 11; Sophia Schachter and Elsa Gilbertson, "Union Square," (unpub. manuscript submitted to the Program in Historic Preservation, Columbia University, A8790, June 1982), 3.
4. Ibid., s.v. 1831 Nov. 7.
5. Valentine, 480; Schachter and Gilbertson, 5.
6. Stokes, s.v. 1833 Apr. 4,; 1833 Apr. 20; 1833 Nov. 12; 1834 Jan. 14; 1834 May 30; 1835 May 14; 1836 Aug. 3; 1839 July 19; 1842 Oct. 11, 13; on use of the term "Union Square" see: Schachter and Gilbertson, 7.
7. M. Christine Boyer, Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style, 1850-1900 (New York, 1985), 45; for the development of this area, see: Charles Lockwood, Bricks and Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1924: An Architectural and Social History (New York, 1972), 132, 135-136; Charles Lockwood, Manhattan Moves Uptown (Boston, 1976), 165-171.
8. A History of Real Estate, Building, and Architecture in New York City (1898; rpt. New York, 1967), 129.
9. The section above is based on research by Gale Harris and Lisa Koenigsberg, which was revised by Elisa Urbanelli.
10. "Plans for Everett House Site Improvement," Real Estate Record & Guide 81, no. 2101 (June 1908), 1178; "Architect for Everett House Site Improvement," RER&G 82, no. 2187 (Aug. 1, 1908), 245.
11. "Construction: Silk Trade Also Coming to Fourth Avenue. Nine Million Dollars for Construction Represented by the Visible Operations -- A Great Commission District Building Up," RER&G 86, no. 2216 (Sept. 3, 1910), 371-372; Schachter and Gilbertson, 30.
12. "Office Building for 4th Ave. & 17th St.," RER&G 84, no. 2160 (Aug. 7, 1909), 263; "4th AV, n e cor 17th St.," RER&G 85, no. 2192 (Mar. 19, 1910), 595; "C. T. Wills to Erect Building for Germania Life," RER&G 85, no. 2185 (Jan. 29,

- 1910), 221-222.
13. The following summary is drawn from J. M. Kesslinger, Guardian of a Century, 1860-1960 (New York, 1960); see also: King's Handbook of New York City (Boston, 1893), 624-626.
 14. Kesslinger, 23.
 15. Schachter and Gilbertson, 42.
 16. Kesslinger, 18.
 17. King's Handbook, 626.
 18. The Surveyor, quoted in Kesslinger, 65.
 19. Kesslinger, 66-67.
 20. On Yost: "Yost, Joseph Warren," Who's Who in America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Men and Women of the United States (Chicago, 1920), 3172; Joseph Warren Yost, [Obituary]. New York Times Nov. 27, 1923, p. 19: 1; "Yost, Joseph Warren," The National Cyclopedic of American Biography Being the History of the United States vol. 13 (New York, 1906), 495; On D'Oench: Albert P. D'Oench, [Obituary]. NYT July 22, 1918, p. 11: 6; "D'Oench, Albert Frederick," The National Cyclopedic of American Biography Being the History of the United States vol. 27 (New York, 1939), 109; see also: Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects Deceased. (1956; rpt. Los Angeles, 1970), 178, 676.
 21. Dennis Steadman Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900 (New York, 1980), 27.
 22. In "Richard Morris Hunt: Architectural Innovator and Father of a 'Distinctive' American School," The Architecture of Richard Morris Hunt, ed. Susan R. Stein, (Chicago, 1986), 74: Sarah Bradford Landau notes that around 1876 Raht was the supervising architect for Hunt's Coal and Iron Exchange Building; this suggests that Raht and D'Oench may have met while both were employed by Hunt. It is also possible that D'Oench worked for Raht when he was serving as Hunt's supervising architect.
 23. According to Francis, Architects in Practice, in 1900 Simon's offices -- like D'Oench & Yost's -- were located at 289 Fourth Avenue.

24. "C. T. Wills to Erect a Building for Germania Life," RER&G 85, no. 2185 (Jan. 29, 1910), 221-222.
25. "Yost," National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, 495.
26. Ibid.
27. Francis, 27.
28. "Plans Ready for Enlargement of Tribune Building," RER&G 75, no. 1931 (Mar. 18, 1905), 573; "Frankfort St. -- D'Oench, Yost & Thouvard inform the Record and Guide that they are still taking figures on the general contract for the 11-sty Tribune Building alteration," RER&G 75, no. 1933 (Apr. 1, 1905), 685.
29. Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Masengale, New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890-1915 (New York, 1983), 158; note that "D'Oench & Yost continued the theme of the steep roof on a corner tower ... Its enormous mansard was capped by an illuminated sign that ran along its entire southern ridge, a rare example of an instance where the building's unique form was not considered sufficiently symbolic of its principal tenant's identity." In the AIA Guide to New York City (1967; second ed., New York, 1978), 113; Elliot Willensky and Norval White term "the tower's crowning glory, its mansard." In The City Observed: New York, A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan (New York, 1979), 91; Paul Goldberger concurred that "most pleasing is the four-story mansard roof ... it sits comfortably on the square with none of the pretentious fussiness one often finds in elaborate mansards."
30. Stern et al, 22.
31. Marcus Whiffen and Frederick Koeper, American Architecture: Volume 2: 1860-1976 (1981; 1st paperback ed., Cambridge, 1983), 211; Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles (1969; 2nd printing, Cambridge, 1981), 103.
32. Whiffen and Koeper, 239.
33. For a discussion of the literature on the early skyscraper and the Tribune Building, see: Paul R. Baker, Richard Morris Hunt (Cambridge, 1980), 503.
34. Montgomery Schuyler, "Some Recent Skyscrapers," Architectural Record 22, no. 3 (Sept. 1907), 162, below a photograph of Hunt's Tribune Building, R. M. Hunt and

D'Oench & Yost are listed as the architects.

35. Baker, 221.
36. On the Tribune Building (and the vertical emphasis imparted by the tower), see: Landau, 55-58.
37. "Plate L: Germania Life Insurance Building," Architecture (May 1911).
38. Kenneth Turney Gibbs, Business Architectural Imagery in America, 1870-1930 (Ann Arbor, 1984), 24.
39. Herman E. Kroos and Charles Gilbert, American Business History (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972), 232, quoted in Gibbs, 25.
40. Gibbs, 25.
41. M. F. Sweetser, New York: The American Cosmopolis (Boston, 1894), 30, quoted in Gibbs, 25.
42. Gibbs, 24.
43. Gibbs, 39.
44. Gibbs, 28.
45. Gibbs, 37.
46. Gibbs, 118, 120.
47. Doreen Yarwood, The Architecture of Europe (New York, 1974), 340-341.
48. Montgomery Schuyler, "The Sky-Scraper Up-to-Date," Architectural Record 8, no. 3 (Jan.-Mar. 1899), 231-257.
49. David coined this term in an analysis of "the real estate and building movement" that transformed Fourth Avenue between Union Square and Thirtieth Street at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century; his article "The New Architecture: The First American Type of Real Value," Architectural Record 28, no. 6 (Dec. 1910), 388-403; was excerpted in RER&G as "The New Architecture. The First American Type of Real Value Represented by the Group of Commercial Buildings on Fourth Avenue," RER&G 86, no. 2232 (Dec. 24, 1910), 1085.

50. "Comparative Types in Office and Loft Buildings," Architecture & Building 43, no. 10 (July 1911), 428.
51. "Comparative Types in Office and Loft Buildings," 434.
52. "Comparative Types in Office and Loft Buildings," 434; this article is fully illustrated with plans and street elevations, a perspective photograph; details of the hallway; photographs of the hallway and the general offices; details of the dome and interior finishings in side elevation and plan.
53. "Comparative Types in Office and Loft Buildings," 425.
54. An illustration of the Guardian Life Building as completed appears in Architecture (May 1911), Plate 50.
55. NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 873, Lot 1. NB 149-1910, Municipal Archives, Surrogate's Court.
56. NB 149-1910.
57. Conversation with Steve Semlich, Manager of Building Operations, The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America on September 8, 1988.
58. NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 873, Lot 1. BN 1806-1940; BN 2868-1957; Alt. 1593-1958. Municipal Archives, Surrogate's Court. Willensky and White, p. 113, praise the annex added to the building: "Next door is the sleek annex, a simple grid of aluminum and glass, infilled with white blinds." Paul Goldberger, p. 91, also lauds the addition: "by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, dating from 1961, and while its Miesian style is surprising beside the main building, it comes off -- largely one suspects, because it is low and deferential to the main building in scale, if not in style."

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Germania Life Insurance Company Building (now the Guardian Life Building) has a special character, 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 Germania Life Insurance Company Building (now the Guardian Life Building) is a twenty-story commercial building, crowned by an early and impressive example of modern signage; that it was designed by the architectural firm of D'Oench & Yost and built in 1910-11 as the national headquarters for the Germania Life Insurance Company of New York (now The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America, the continuation of the original firm); that the building is a tripartite columnar skyscraper which incorporates in its design motifs from traditional European architecture, most prominently the grand four-story mansard roof with varied dormer windows; that the mansard roof and other features tie the building's design to French architecture, both the Second Empire style and the modern French mode that dominated Parisian architecture of the 1890s; that by employing the mansard, D'Oench & Yost alluded to a mansarded building that previously housed the company, thus continuing an architectural tradition which began around 1870 and conveyed a sound public image; and that the Germania Life Insurance Company Building is prominently located on a corner site visible from Union Square and, together with the monumental Everett Building directly across the avenue, forms an imposing terminus to Park Avenue South.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, 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 Germania Life Insurance Company Building (now the Guardian Life Building), 50 Park Avenue South, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 873, Lot 1, in part consisting of the western portion of the lot, which is approximately 80 feet by 115 feet, on which the described building is situated, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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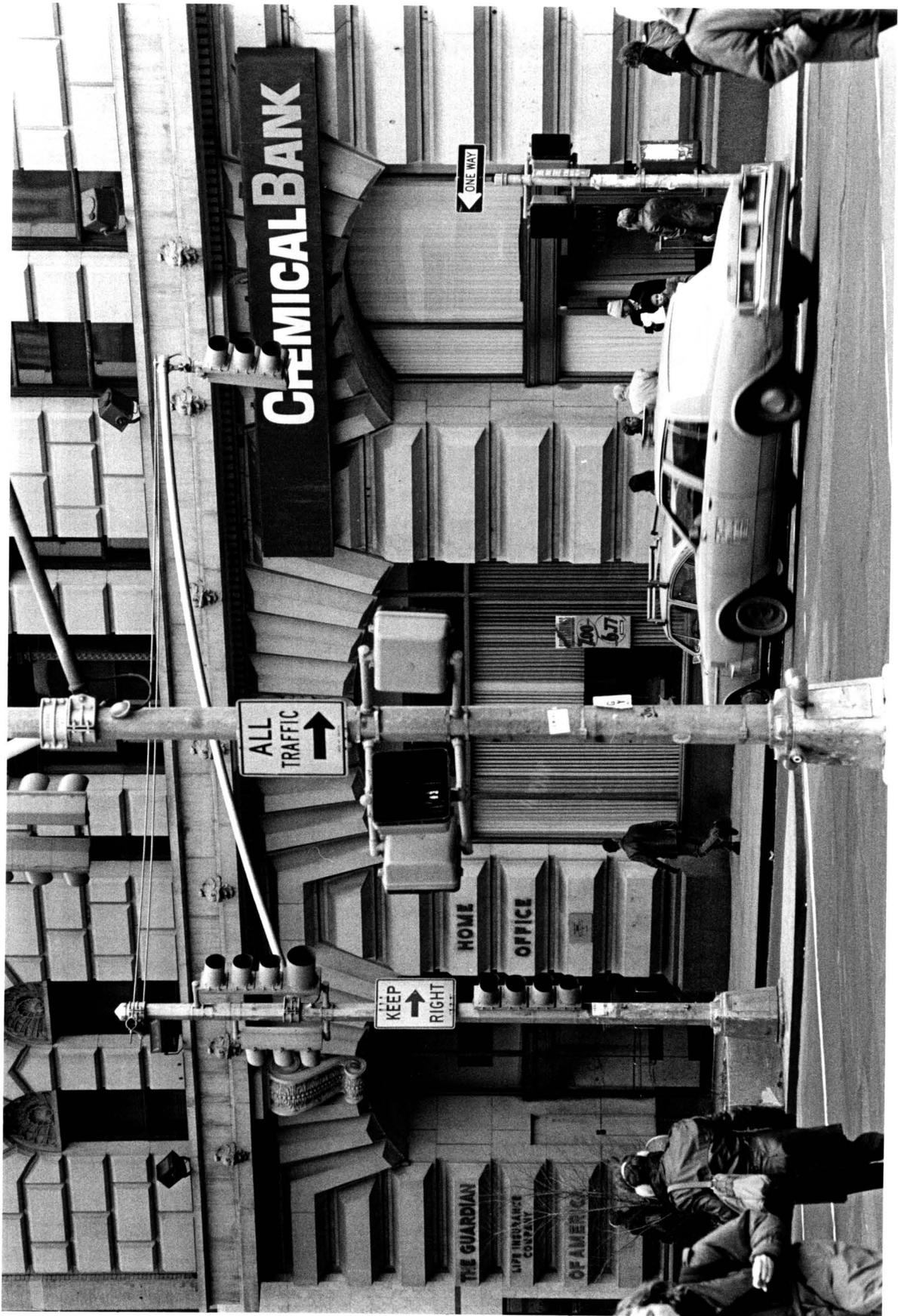
The Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)
50 Union Square East
Built 1910-11

Architect: D'Oench & Yost
Photo credit: Carl Forster



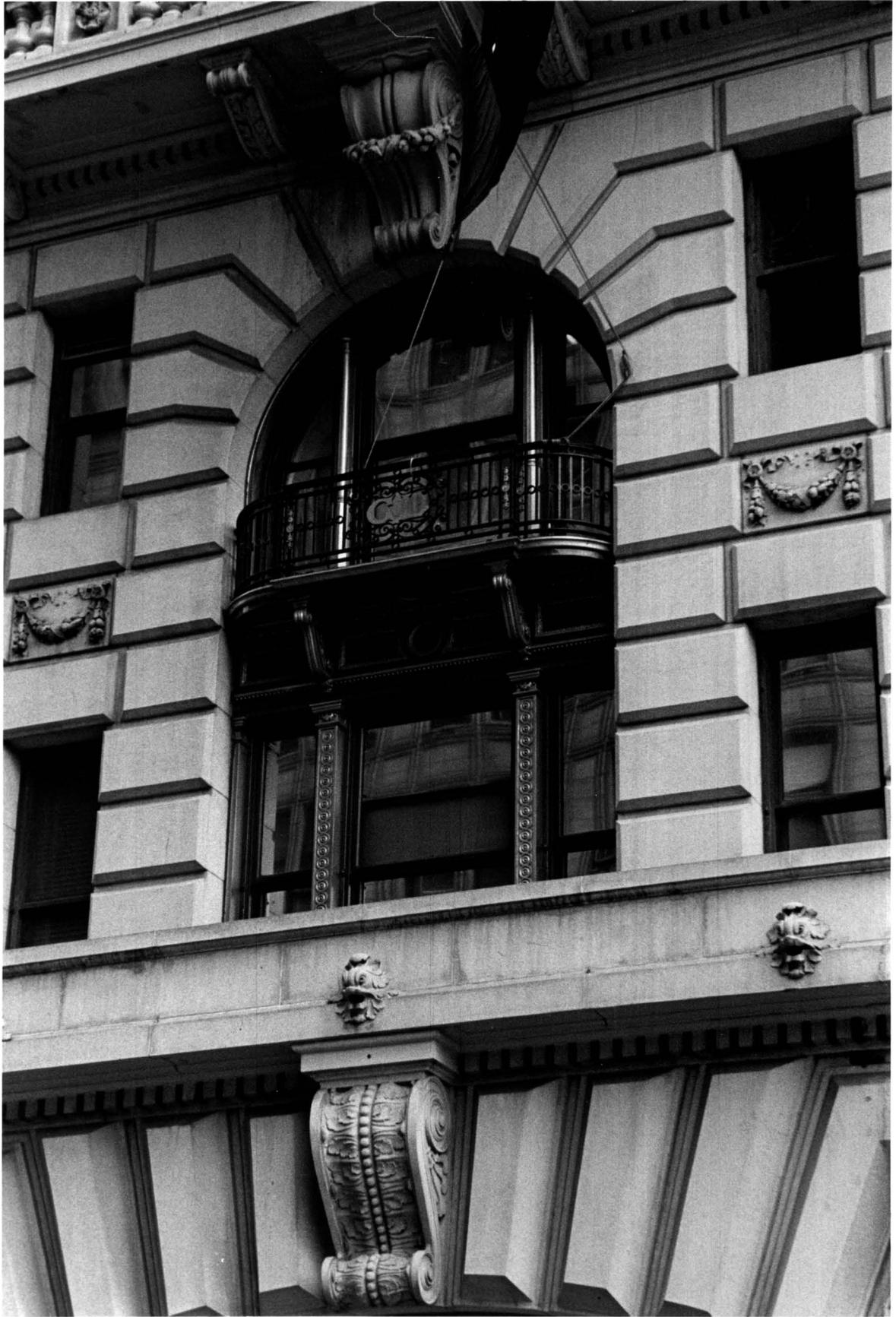
The Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)
Detail, ground and second stories

Photo credit: Carl Forster



The Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)
Ground story, Park Avenue South elevation

Photo credit: Carl Forster



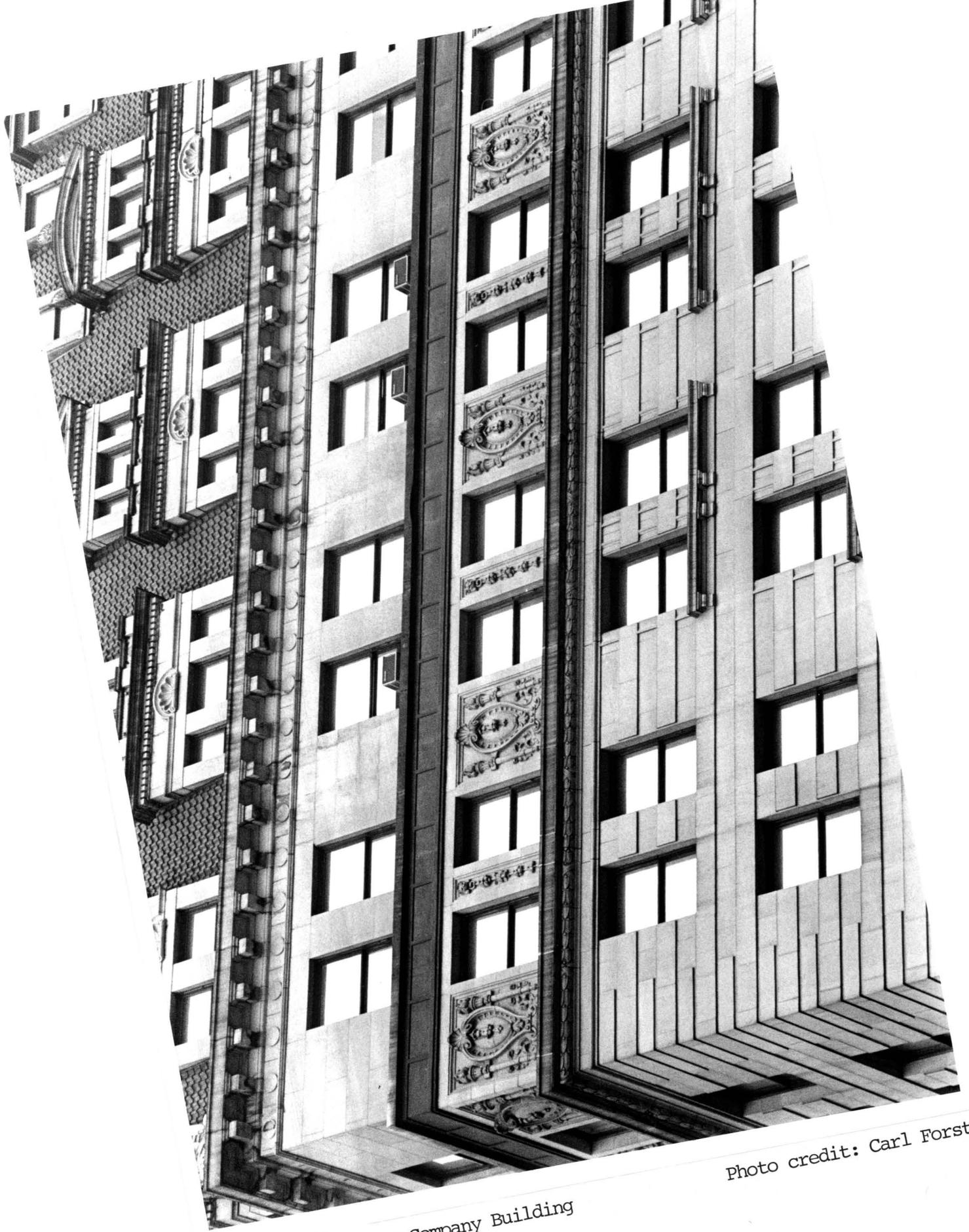
The Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)
Detail, second story, Park Avenue South elevation

Photo credit: Carl Forster



The Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)
Detail, second and third stories

Photo credit: Carl Forster



The Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)
Detail, upper stories and roof

Photo credit: Carl Forster

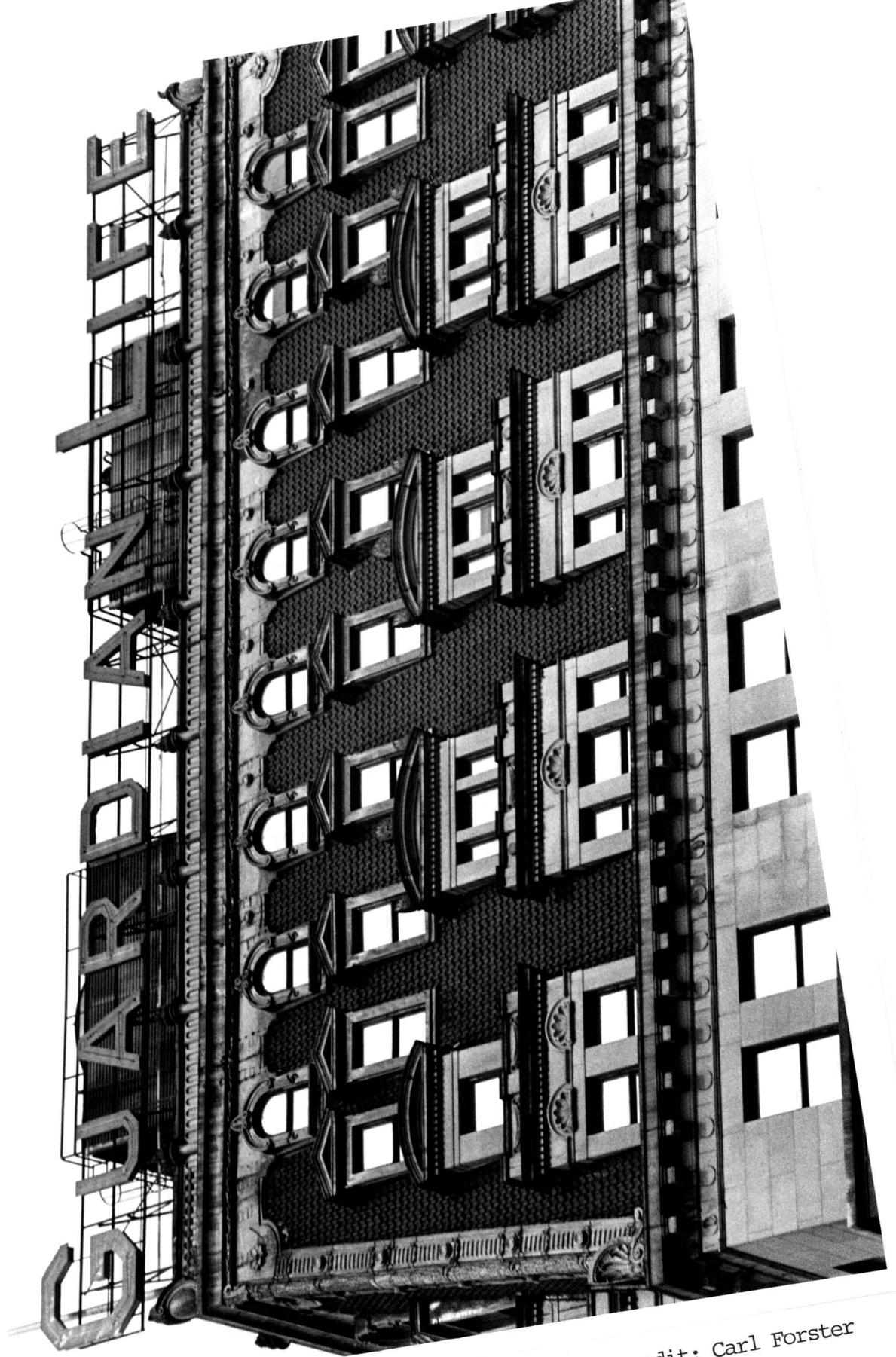
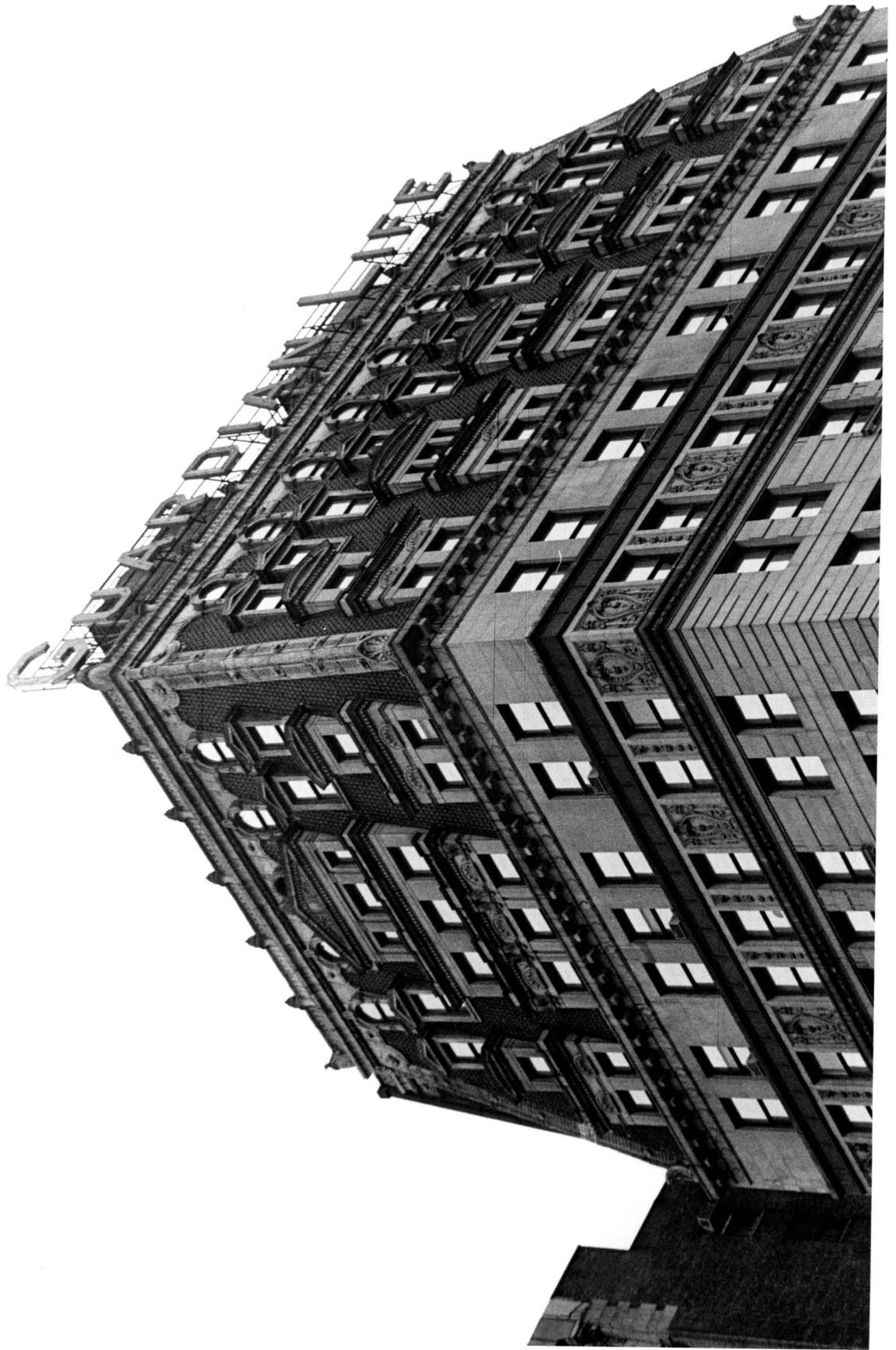


Photo credit: Carl Forster

The Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)
Mansard roof and illuminated sign



The Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)
Upper stories, roof, and illuminated sign

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Germania Life Insurance Company Building
(now Guardian Life Building)

Photo from: Architecture
(May 1911), Plate L.

