

**THE STUDEBAKER BUILDING**, 1469 Bedford Avenue (aka 737-745 Sterling Place), Brooklyn.  
Built 1920; Tooker and Marsh, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map 1239, Lot 1

On October 31, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Studebaker Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A representative from the Historic Districts Council spoke in favor of the designation. In addition, the Commission received letters from the Friends of Terra Cotta and the owner in support of the proposed designation.

#### Summary

Built in 1920, the Studebaker Building is one of the few automobile showrooms remaining on Brooklyn's once thriving Automobile Row, the stretch of Bedford Avenue running north and south from Fulton Street to Empire Boulevard in Crown Heights. The corporation deemed the Brooklyn location desirable due to the large number of car owners in the borough, and the building was constructed at the height of Studebaker's prominence as an automobile manufacturer. Designed by New York-based architects Tooker and Marsh, the neo-Gothic style building is brick, clad in white terra cotta manufactured by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Works, the largest fabricator of architectural terra cotta in the world from the turn-of-the-century to the Depression. Significant features of the building include segmental arched openings on the fourth floor, battlemented parapet with black and white terra-cotta wheel emblems, and neo-Gothic style details including moldings, colonettes, and figural sculpture. An excellent example of a commercial terra-cotta clad structure which served as a company icon, the Studebaker Building retains the original terra-cotta design inscribed with the name "Studebaker" in black cursive on a diagonal banner across the wheel emblem, an image that was used by the corporation on buildings throughout the United States. The ground and second floors were remodeled in 2000 to accommodate a residential use.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### History of Crown Heights and Development of Automobile Row

Located in the central section of Brooklyn, Crown Heights shares much of its history with the adjacent community of Bedford-Stuyvesant, both of which were within the rural, unincorporated Village of Bedford. In 1827 slavery was abolished in New York State, and free blacks developed the settlements of Weeksville and Carrville, to the east of Bedford Avenue. In the northern part of what is now Crown Heights, mansions were built in the mid-to-late nineteenth century on former farmland; and limestone row houses and apartment houses were built after the construction of Eastern Parkway (1870-1874), the east-west boulevard designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux that bisects Bedford Avenue. Many of Brooklyn's great cultural and recreational monuments were built in this area of Crown Heights: Prospect Park (1866-1905), the Brooklyn Museum (McKim, Mead and White, 1897-1924), Grand Army Plaza (1870), the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (1910), the Brooklyn Children's Museum (1897, demolished), the Brooklyn Public Library (1941) and Ebbets Field (demolished), the elaborate baseball stadium built for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1913 at the intersection of Bedford Avenue and Empire Boulevard.<sup>1</sup>

Bedford Avenue was an important north-south transportation corridor, transversing Crown Heights and intersecting Eastern Parkway. It was originally laid out to extend from the Village of Williamsburgh to Grant Square in Crown Heights, and the section from Fulton Street southward opened on May 3, 1871.<sup>2</sup> The advent of the automobile in the first decades of the twentieth century brought changes in land use throughout Brooklyn, and gas stations, public parking garages, car showrooms and repair facilities congregated in certain easily accessible areas.<sup>3</sup> In the first decade of the twentieth century, much of Bedford Avenue between Fulton Street and Empire Boulevard was undeveloped.<sup>4</sup> Its proximity to an affluent community, the availability of unimproved tracts of land, and its established prominence as a transportation corridor made Bedford Avenue a logical place for the development of automotive showrooms and related automobile facilities. As early as 1912 *Trow's Business Directory* lists twenty-five automobile establishments along this stretch of Bedford Avenue.<sup>5</sup> Beginning in 1911, the Brooklyn Auto Show was held yearly at the Twenty-Third Regiment Armory on Bedford Avenue between

Atlantic and Pacific streets, in the heart of Brooklyn's Automobile Row. The significant event received national attention. A 1918 *New York Times* article outlines the importance of the show.

*With 107 exhibitors for its two weeks' exhibition, the seventh annual Automobile Show, under the auspices of the Brooklyn Motor Dealers' Association, was opened last night in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment Armory, Bedford Avenue between Atlantic and Pacific Streets. The exhibit this week is confined to passenger cars, of which thirty-five makes are shown including "Studebaker." Next Thursday night Secretary of State Francis M. Hugo will be a guest of the association and will speak at the show.*<sup>6</sup>

The following year *The New York Times* reported a display of almost 200 passenger cars representing forty-four makes. The article includes Studebaker in the list of cars to be displayed and points out that "all the popular models and types are shown, including a few cars which were not exhibited in the New York show."<sup>7</sup> By 1929 Bedford Avenue and its adjacent blocks were filled with showrooms for cars and trucks made by Chrysler, Buick, Pontiac, Ford, Marmon, Haas, and General Motors.<sup>8</sup> The traffic along Bedford Avenue became so heavy that the Police Department installed a traffic tower at Grant Square.<sup>9</sup>

### History of the Studebaker Corporation<sup>10</sup>

The Studebaker Corporation began in 1852 in South Bend, Indiana as the H. & C. Studebaker Company, a black smithing business established by Henry and Clement Studebaker. By the Civil War, the company was a major wagon manufacturer, supplying wagons and ambulances to the U. S. Army, and in 1868 it became known as the Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company. By 1895, production reached 75,000 horse-drawn vehicles, and the company was the world's largest wagon producer in the world. Encouraged by his son-in-law, Frederick Fish, J. M. Studebaker began experimenting with automobile production and in 1902, Studebaker produced its first electric car. In 1904, the Studebaker Automobile Company was formed to manufacture both electric and gasoline automobiles. As a means of expanding its business into gasoline-powered automobiles, the Studebaker Company bought one-third interest in Everitt-Metzger-Flanders Company in 1909. By 1911, Studebaker had acquired all of

Everitt-Metzger-Flanders, a conglomerate of automobile producers, and was the second largest automobile producer in the United States. In the 1920s, Albert Erskine, the first non-Studebaker-family member to become president of Studebaker took the company into a period of rapid expansion. It was in this period that the Studebaker Building on Bedford Avenue and Sterling Place was built in Brooklyn. The Studebaker annual report for the year 1920 details that the amount charged to the plant and property account was \$36,162,604.61 covering the construction of the plants in South Bend, new buildings in Detroit, and the branch store in Brooklyn. In the 1920s when many other automobile companies were becoming unsteady, Studebaker hit production highs with the manufacture of 145,167 cars in 1923. In 1928, Studebaker purchased the prosperous Pierce-Arrow Motor Car Company. The corporation remained in the top ten American automobile producers through the 1920s and was one of the few independents to survive the Great Depression. The corporation did not, however, survive unscathed. In 1932, Studebaker almost went bankrupt; by 1933 the corporation had gone into receivership under White Motors. Two Studebaker vice presidents, Paul Hoffman and Harold Vance, subsequently took over leadership of the corporation and brought it out of receivership. In 1936, the corporation hired world-famous designer Raymond Loewy to assist with its automobile design and consequently had some major successes in styling innovations. The designs of 1947, 1953, and the 1963 Avanti were impressive and popular, but unfortunately, Studebaker could not compete with auto giants like Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors. A merger with Packard in 1954 did not significantly increase the corporation's competitive edge, and by 1963, Studebaker closed its plant in South Bend, Indiana.

### The Studebaker Building

In December 1919, the Studebaker Corporation of America acquired the property at the northeast corner of Bedford Avenue and Sterling Place.<sup>11</sup> A February 1, 1920 article in the *Brooklyn Eagle* detailed the need for a Brooklyn location.

*Having a large clientele of users in Brooklyn, Studebaker has selected a location at the corner of Bedford ave. and Sterling pl., and on this site will be erected a \$250,000 building of concrete and terra cotta tiling. The building will be a service station and salesroom par extraordinaire. Complete in the fullest detail, it will give Studebaker a home in Brooklyn such as those in charge of*

*that part of the business have long dreamed of.*<sup>12</sup>

By April 7, 1920, the architectural firm of Tooker and Marsh filed permits for the construction of the Studebaker automobile showroom. The building permit notes that the new Studebaker facility would be four stories with a mezzanine. The foundations were of stone; upper wall material was brick. Floor construction and interior columns were made of reinforced concrete. Load-bearing capacity for each floor was one hundred twenty pounds per square foot with the exception of the mezzanine which was used for offices and had a load-bearing capacity of sixty pounds per square foot. Building permits allowed for a tile and cement floor surface and for outside window frames and sash to be partially metal and partially wood.<sup>13</sup> Typical of automotive buildings being constructed throughout the country at this time, the Studebaker Building was fireproof and the showroom and salesroom were to the front with the garage at the rear or tower section on Sterling Place. Offices occupied a mezzanine floor, and there were wide expansive windows on the ground floor for displaying cars. The exterior of the Studebaker Building was clad in terra cotta made by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Works, the largest terra-cotta manufacturer in the world from the turn-of-the-century to the Depression.<sup>14</sup> Illustrations of the building were featured in *Architectural Record* and *The Architectural Forum*, two prestigious national architectural magazines. Unlike other automobile buildings designed during this period in a stripped Classical or Utilitarian style, the Studebaker Building was designed in the neo-Gothic style with exuberant ornament. The building further attracted its potential customers through the large showroom windows, light-colored terra cotta, and the Studebaker logo.

By 1934, the Studebaker Building was a showroom and sales office not only for new cars but for used cars as well.<sup>15</sup> The only other documented alterations to the building prior to 1941 were the addition or alteration of electric signs in 1925, 1926, 1936 and 1937.<sup>16</sup> By 1939, Studebaker had ceased its operations at this location but still maintained sales operations through independent dealers and distributors throughout Brooklyn. The corporation continued to operate a parts department at 1375 Bushwick Avenue.<sup>17</sup>

In 1941 building permits were filed to alter the architecture and use classification of the Studebaker Building. William Heitner was the owner of record in 1941, and he hired architect Irving Cohen to file the necessary paperwork to make the changes.<sup>18</sup> By 1946, the first floor was used as a dress store and showroom;

the mezzanine was used as offices; the second floor served as space for packing drygoods, specifically sweaters; the third floor was a furniture showroom, and the fourth floor was for the manufacture of furniture.<sup>19</sup>

In 1999, the Studebaker Building was sold to a Brooklyn-based developer and in 2000, he converted the building into twenty-seven apartments for homeless, disabled and low-income families.<sup>20</sup>

### Tooker and Marsh, Architects

E. Post Tooker

Reginald E. Marsh (1885-1966)

Little is known about the personal life of E. Post Tooker. He formed a partnership with Reginald E. Marsh in 1914, and the architectural firm of Tooker and Marsh is best known for its designs of school buildings. The firm was particularly prolific in upstate New York, Long Island, and New Jersey and its designs include numerous grade schools, high schools, and several colleges.

Reginald E. Marsh was born on May 29, 1885 in Saratoga Springs, New York. He received his Bachelor's Degree in 1906 from Cornell University where he majored in Architecture and his Master's Degree in Architecture in 1907 also from Cornell. He worked as a draftsman for Taylor and Levi (1907), McKim, Mead & White (1908), Charles W. Leavitt (1909-11), and Trowbridge & Ackerman (1912-1913). In 1960 Governor Rockefeller named Marsh as one of eight architects to draw up standards for state schools.<sup>21</sup>

As early as 1913, Reginald E. Marsh and E. Post Tooker were practicing architecture independently but both had offices at 101 Park Avenue in Manhattan, the Architects Building, which was home to numerous architects, engineers, and individuals and firms related to the building trade.<sup>22</sup> In 1914, they formed Tooker and Marsh. Tooker lived at 283 Ryerson in Brooklyn in 1916, and Marsh also lived in Brooklyn. By 1925, Tooker had moved to Manhasset, Long Island and Marsh to Bronxville, New York. They maintained their practice together at 101 Park Avenue until 1946.<sup>23</sup>

In 1920, Tooker and Marsh wrote an article for *Architecture* entitled "General Principles of School Planning and Construction" in which they outlined underlying design concepts and requirements for school buildings. Although most of the firm's work focused on school construction, Tooker and Marsh took on other commissions as well. An early work of the firm was the design for Bear Mountain Inn, the headquarters building for the Palisades Interstate Park,

Bear Mountain, New York.<sup>24</sup> The firm also designed a building for People's Trust Company in Tamaqua, Pennsylvania and the Treasurer's Office Building in Suffolk County, New York.<sup>25</sup> In addition to these public/corporate commissions, the firm designed large private residences in Bronxville, Manhasset, and Hartsdale, New York.<sup>26</sup> The Studebaker Building in Brooklyn appears to be the only automobile-related building that Tooker and Marsh designed.

### Description

The Studebaker Building is a neo-Gothic style concrete, brick, and terra-cotta structure located on the northeast corner of Bedford Avenue and Sterling Place in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. The main portion of the building was originally four stories in height with a five-story tower that fronts on Sterling Place. The 2000 renovation of the building made the following exterior and interior alterations: The first story was divided into two stories and non-historic windows reflect this change on the exterior. The building is now a five-story building with a six-story tower. A rounded corner clad with white terra-cotta connects facades on each street. The storefronts on the original ground floor and second story have been removed, and non-historic infill consists of windows and cast-stone panels. Original spandrels and second-floor windows have been replaced by smaller windows and cast-stone panels. Openings on the first floor are grouped and inset into the façade. They are framed with historic moldings inset with rosettes. Masonry walls between the groups are original. An original terra-cotta stringcourse with a rosette pattern separates the roof line from the original fourth story. Delineating the original second story from the third story is an original stringcourse with a band of quatrefoils and diamonds intermittently separated by corbelled sculptures of two figures holding a shield. This shield appears to be the base of a rounded colonette which extends from the top of the stringcourse past the roof line and is crowned by a hexagonal finial. Towards the top of the pilaster is an elaborate composite capital with a foliate motif and a man's head in the center. There are nine pilasters which divide the original upper two floors into six identical bays and one tower bay. The building is crowned by a battlemented parapet. Within each bay of the parapet is a white terra-cotta wheel with black spokes made to resemble an automobile steering wheel, making a total of six emblems. The name "Studebaker" is written in white cursive on a black diagonal banner across the wheel.

**Bedford Avenue Façade:** The Bedford Avenue façade is two bays wide with three windows in each

bay of the upper two stories. Although the windows have been replaced with non-historic sash, the window openings on the upper two stories have not been altered. The fourth-floor windows have segmental arched openings reflective of the neo-Gothic design. The original ground floor and second floor have been altered. As previously mentioned the two floors have been made into three; and small, double-hung metal sash windows have replaced the original showroom ground-floor windows and the original second-floor office windows. There are two non-historic metal entrances on the Bedford Avenue façade. A non-historic side door on the far left of the Studebaker Building has one non-historic light fixture overhead. The main entrance of the façade has one non-historic metal door, two non-historic light fixtures on either side of the door, a dark red awning with the name "Studebaker" in white letters over the entrance, and a handicap-accessible ramp leading to the entrance. A low relief featuring the letter "S" in a Gothic script mounted on a shield is located above the entrance door. This was probably moved during the 2000 renovation from its original location above the first floor of the northernmost bay on the Bedford Avenue facade.

**Corner Façade:** The corner façade is one bay wide with five windows in each bay of the upper two stories. Although the windows have been replaced with non-historic sash, the window openings have not been altered on the original third and fourth stories. The fourth-floor windows have segmental arched openings reflective of the neo-Gothic design. The ground floor and second floor have been altered to accommodate three floors instead of the original two. Five smaller windows on each of the three floors have replaced the original showroom/display windows on the ground floor and the five large metal windows on the original mezzanine/office floor. A larger terra-

cotta "Studebaker" sign at the top of the corner is identical in design to the smaller signs in the parapet of the Bedford Avenue and Sterling Place façades.

**Sterling Street Façade:** The Sterling Place façade is identical to the Bedford Avenue façade except that it is three bays wide instead of two. There are three windows in each bay of the upper two stories and although the windows have been replaced with non-historic sash, the window openings on the upper two stories have not been altered. The fourth-floor windows have segmental arched openings reflective of the neo-Gothic design. The original ground floor and second story have been altered. As previously mentioned, the two floors have been made into three; and small, metal double-hung sash windows have replaced the original showroom ground-floor windows and the original second floor office windows.

**Tower:** The original tower was five stories in height, but like the main façades, has been altered on the ground floor and second story. An original garage door opening now has infill and a window. A man's face flanks either end of label moldings on the windows on the first four stories. The parapeted battlement of the other façades is continued as an overlay onto the tower. Above the parapet are three pointed-arched windows with a rosette with linenfold on either side. A white terra-cotta panel with the name "Studebaker" in black cursive is inset into a band of quatrefoil design at the roof line. A small chimney on the west side of the tower is capped with a similar quatrefoil motif.

Report prepared by  
Isabel Hill  
Consultant

#### NOTES

1. Ellen Marie Snyder-Grenier, "Crown Heights," Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 301; Brooklyn In-Touch, *Neighborhood Profile: Crown Heights* (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn In-Touch Information Center, Inc. 1978).
2. Eugene L. Armbruster, *Brooklyn's Eastern District* (Brooklyn, New York: Eugene L. Armbruster, 1942), pp. 72, 86.
3. Ellen M. Snyder-Grenier, *Brooklyn! An Illustrated History* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1966), p. 112.

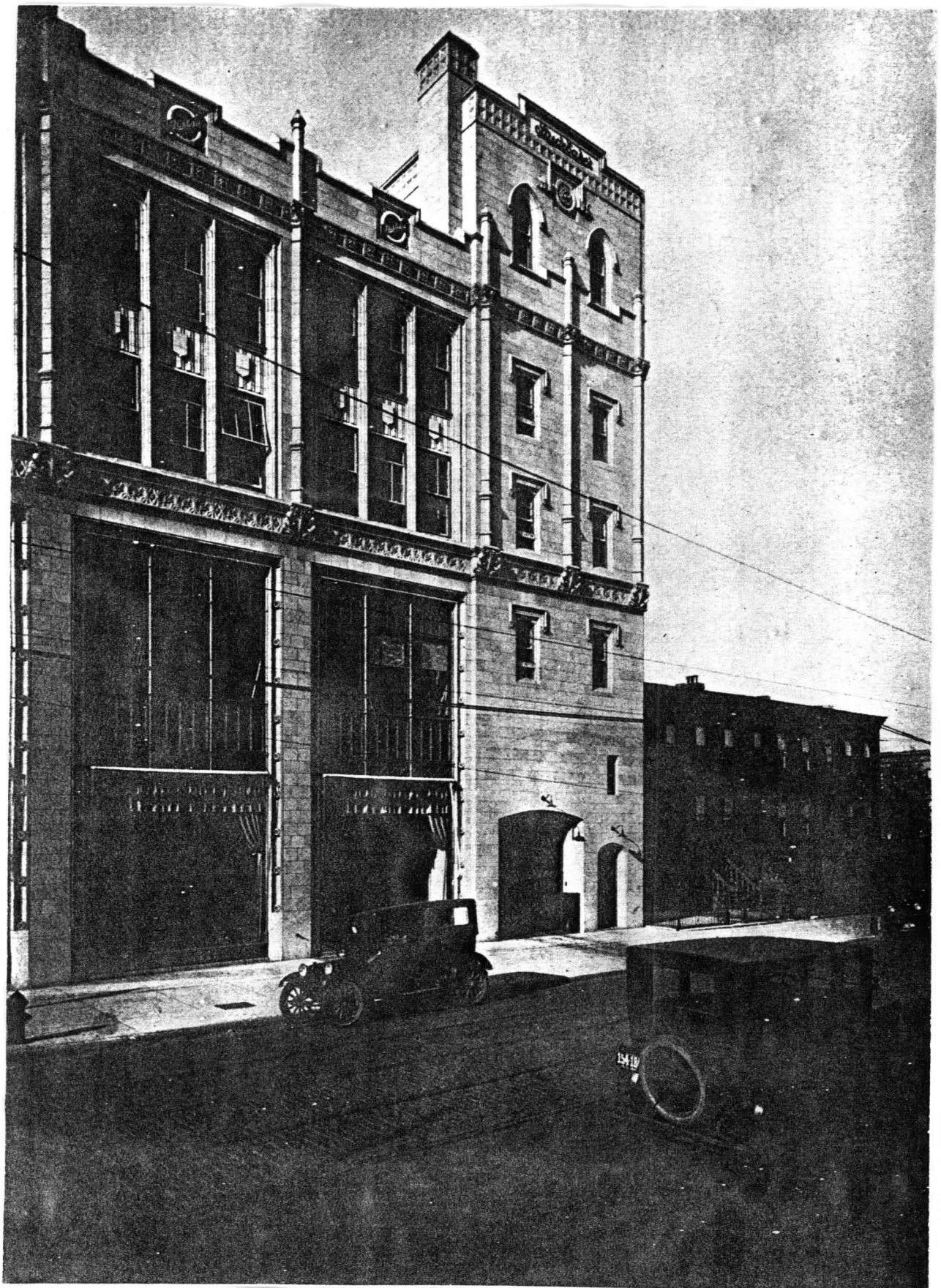
4. Elliot Willensky, *When Brooklyn Was the World 1920-1957* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1986), p.56; *Desk Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn* (New York: E. Belcher Hyde, Inc. 1920), vol.1.
5. *Trow's Business Directory, Brooklyn to Queens*, 1912, p.9.
6. "Brooklyn Show Opens," *The New York Times* (February 24, 1918) IV,6.
7. "Brooklyn Auto Show Open," *The New York Times* (March 30, 1919), 11.
8. *Desk Atlas of the Borough of Brooklyn* (New York: E. Belcher Hyde, Inc. 1929), vol.1.
9. Willensky, *When Brooklyn Was the World*, p. 57. This was one of the city's earliest attempts to regulate traffic and it was like those along Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, installed around the same time.
10. James L. Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1988), p. 63-64; "The Studebaker Story," (brochure from the Studebaker Museum); Studebaker Corporation, "Tenth Annual Report-December 31, 1920"; Donald T. Critchlow, "Studebaker Corporation," George S. May, ed., *The Automobile Industry 1896-1920* (New York: Bruccoli Clark Layman, Inc. and Facts on File, 1990) pp. 434-438.
11. *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* (December 20, 1919), p, 682.
12. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (February 1, 1920).
13. New York City Department of Buildings, Borough of Brooklyn, New Building Application 3710-1920.
14. New York Architectural Terra Cotta Company Archive located at Avery Library, Columbia University, New York City, Job # 29055. The Atlantic Terra Cotta Company manufactured the terra cotta for the Woolworth Building, the Chanin Building, the New York Central Building, and many other structures throughout the United States.
15. *Polk's Brooklyn City Directory* (New York: R. L. Polk & Co. Inc., 1933-34).
16. New York City, Department of Buildings, Borough of Brooklyn, E.S. Permits 9897,1698, and 11724.
17. *Brooklyn Classified Telephone Directory* (New York: The New York Telephone Co., 1938-1939), p.27.
18. New York City, Department of Buildings, Borough of Brooklyn, Application for Minor Structures, Minor Alterations and Repairs, Drop Curb, Fire Escapes, Miscellaneous Application No. 1629-1941.
19. New York City Department of Buildings, Certificate of Occupancy No. 114679-1946.
20. "Former Showroom in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, Is Turned into 27 Rental Apartments; Old Studebaker Building Has New Tenants," *The New York Times* (February 13, 2000).
21. George S. Koyl, ed., *American Architects Directory* (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1962), p. 463; Obituary, *The New York Times* (July 14, 1966).
22. *Trow's General Directory of Manhattan and Bronx, 1913-1914*.
23. *Manhattan Address Telephone Directory*, 1946, p.393-394.
24. *American Architect*, 108 (November 10, 1915) pp. 305-309.
25. *American Architect*, 120 (July 6, 1921) n. 2371.
26. *American Architect*, 120 (July 6, 1921)n. 2371; *American Architect*, 121 (March 15, 1922) n. 2389.

## 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 Studebaker Building has a special character and special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

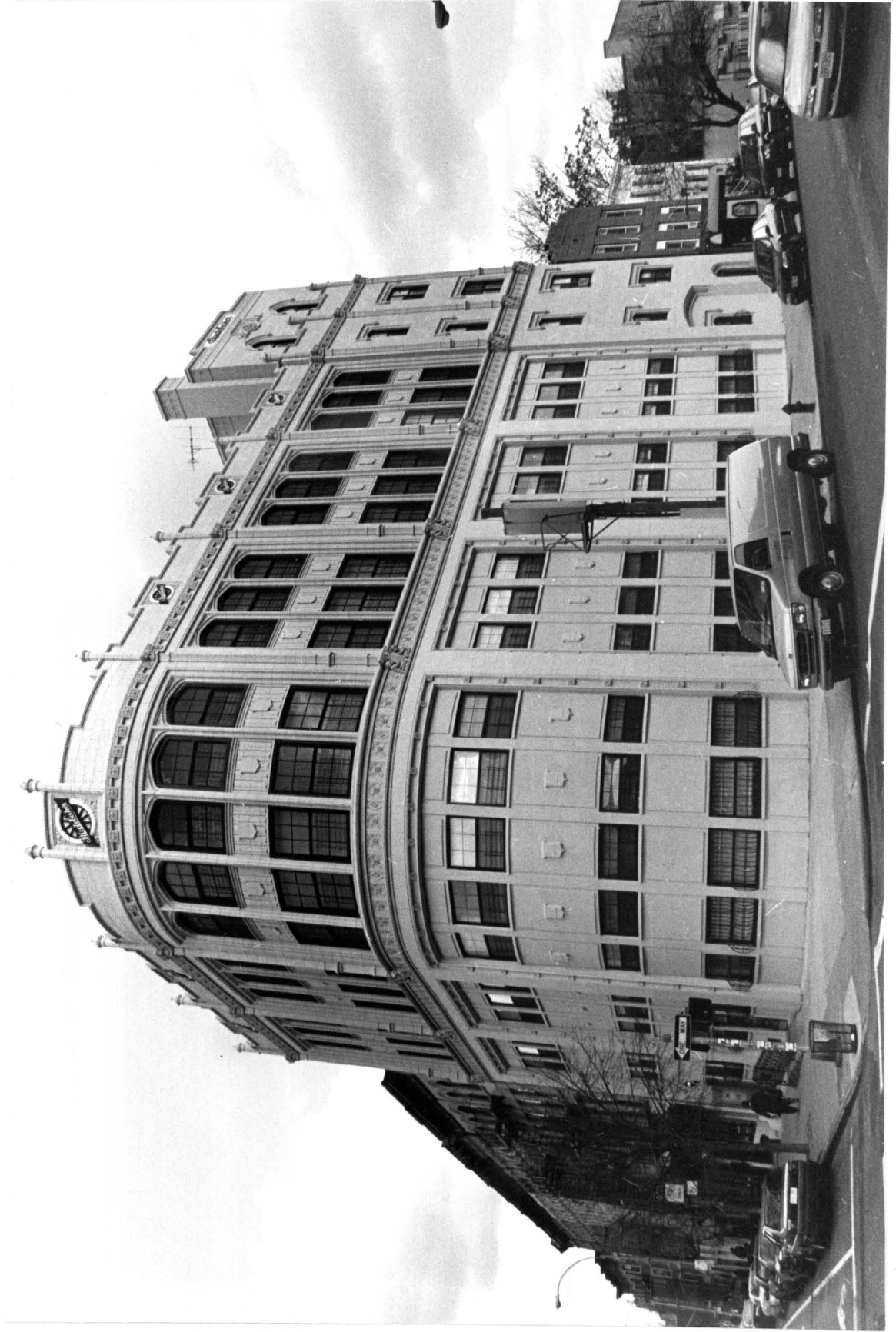
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the four-story Studebaker Building is one of the few automobile showrooms remaining along Brooklyn's "Automobile row," which extended along Bedford Avenue from Fulton Street south to Empire Boulevard; that it was constructed in 1920 by the Studebaker Corporation, at the height of the corporation's prominence, to service an ever-increasing clientele of automobile users ; that it is the only-known automobile showroom designed by architects Tooker and Marsh , a New York-based architectural firm best known for its designs of regional grade and high schools; that the building is made of concrete and brick , clad in terra cotta that was manufactured by the world-famous Atlantic Terra Cotta Works; that it features original segmental arch openings on the fourth floor, a battlemented parapet with black and white terra-cotta wheel emblems, characteristic of other Studebaker Buildings throughout the United States, terra-cotta stringcourses delineating the original second story from the third and the roof line from the original fourth story, and neo-Gothic details including moldings, colonettes, and figural sculpture; that despite some alterations to the building to accommodate residential uses, it remains a notable example of automotive showroom/garage architecture and an excellent example of a commercial terra-cotta clad structure which served as a company icon.

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 Studebaker Building, 1469 Bedford Avenue (aka 737-745 Sterling Place) Borough of Brooklyn and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1239, Lot 1 as its Landmark Site.

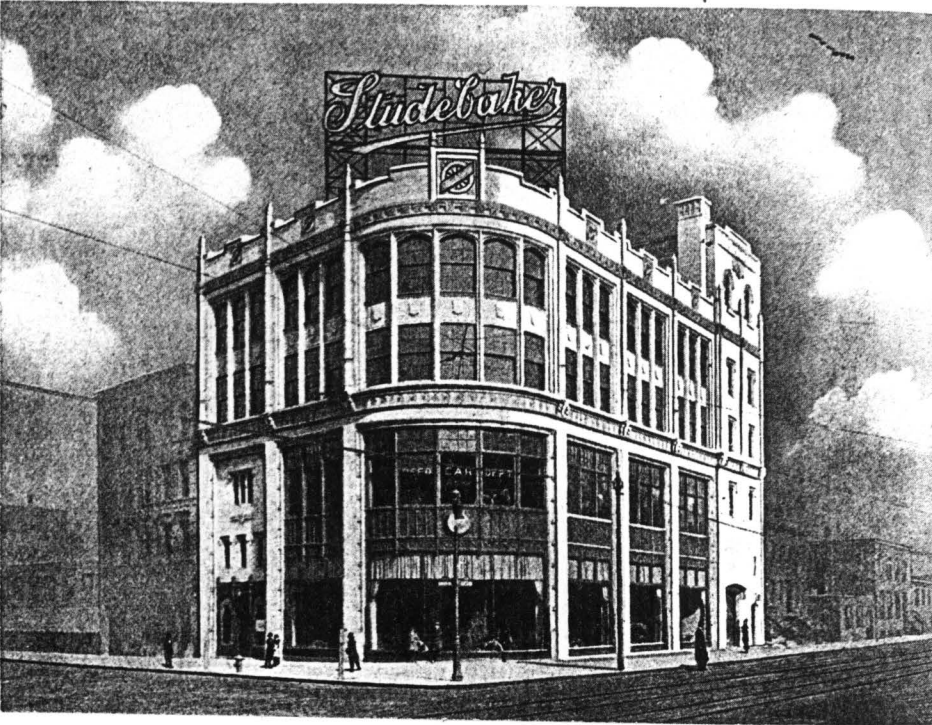


Studebaker Building, Sterling Place facade  
Source: *Architectural Forum* (March 1927)





Studebaker Building  
Photo: Carl Forster



Studebaker Building, circa 1924  
Source: *History of the Studebaker Corporation* (1924)

Studebaker Building, Bedford Avenue facade, fourth and fifth stories  
Photo: Carl Forster





Studebaker Building, detail of molding below fourth floor  
Photo: Carl Forster

Studebaker Building, details of colonette capitols  
Photo: Carl Forster





Studebaker Building, detail of corner  
Photo: Carl Forster

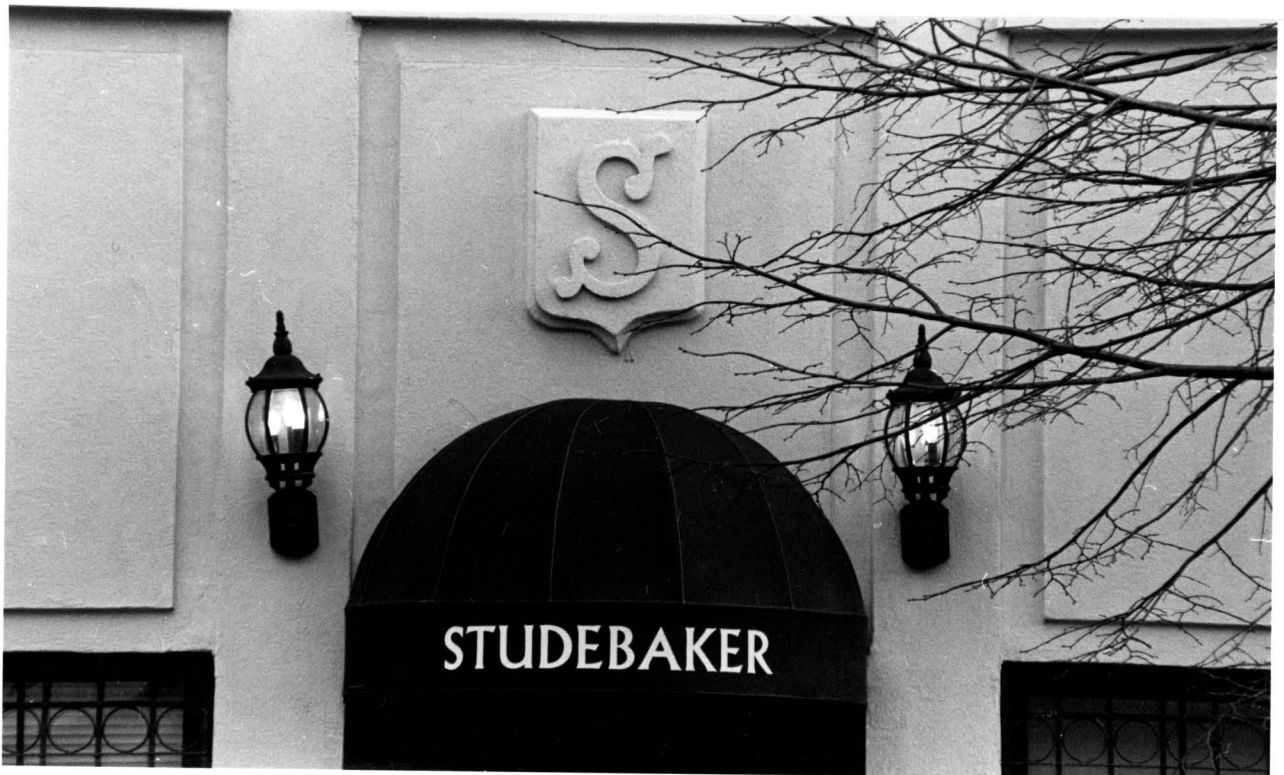


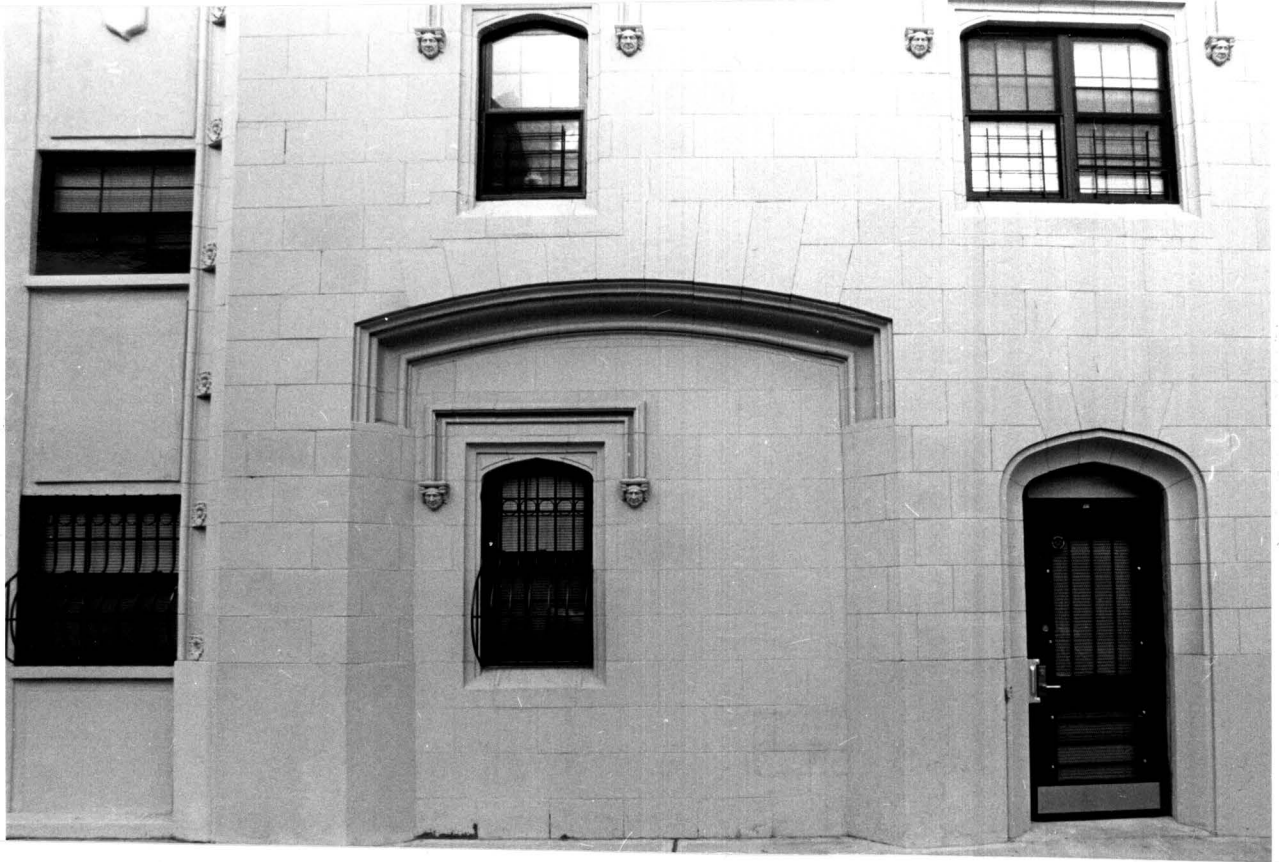
Studebaker Building, detail of tower  
Photo: Carl Forster



Studebaker Building, detail of first through third floor  
Photo: Carl Forster

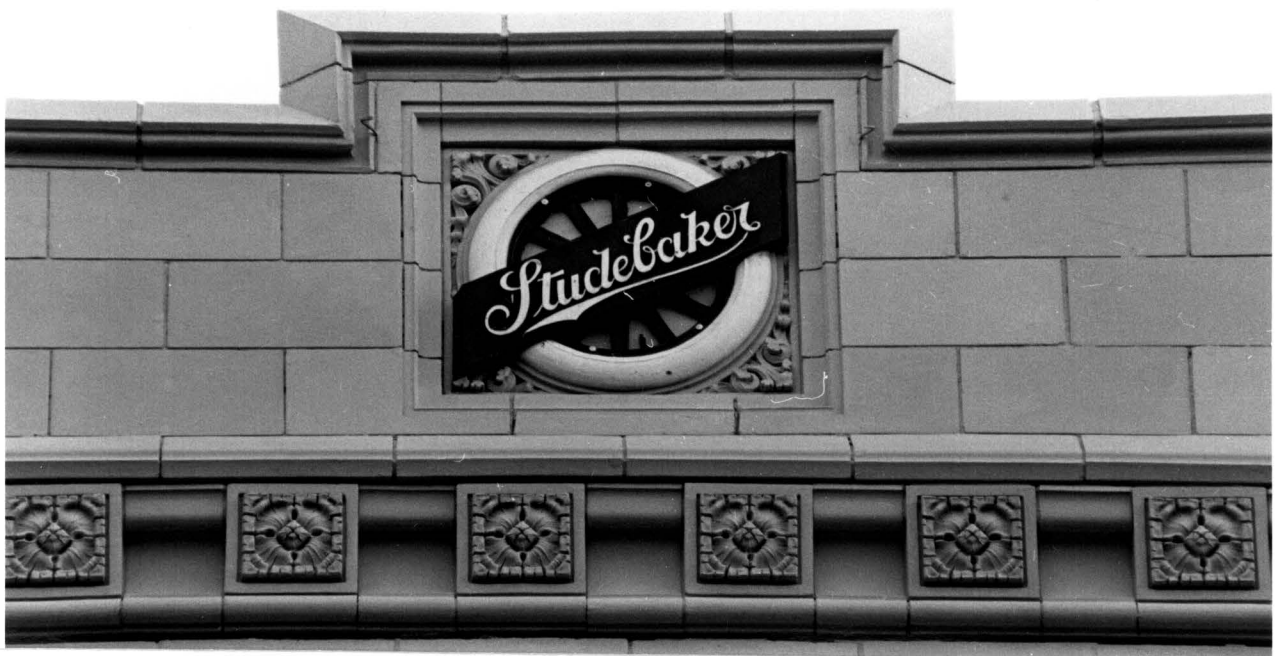
Studebaker Building, detail of cartouche over entrance  
Photo: Carl Forster

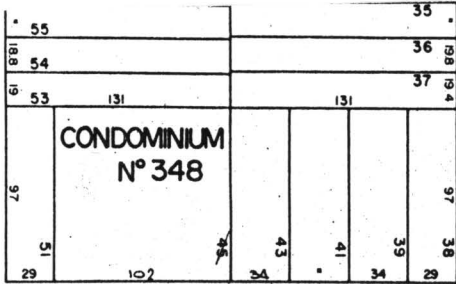




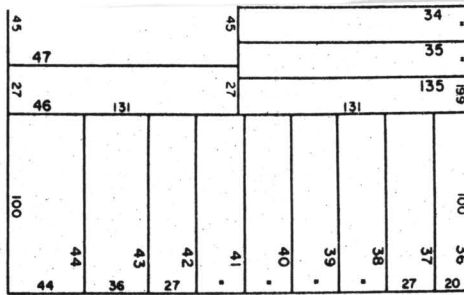
Studebaker Building, detail of former garage entrance on Sterling Place  
Photo: Carl Forster

Studebaker Building, detail of parapet and Studebaker emblem  
Photo: Carl Forster

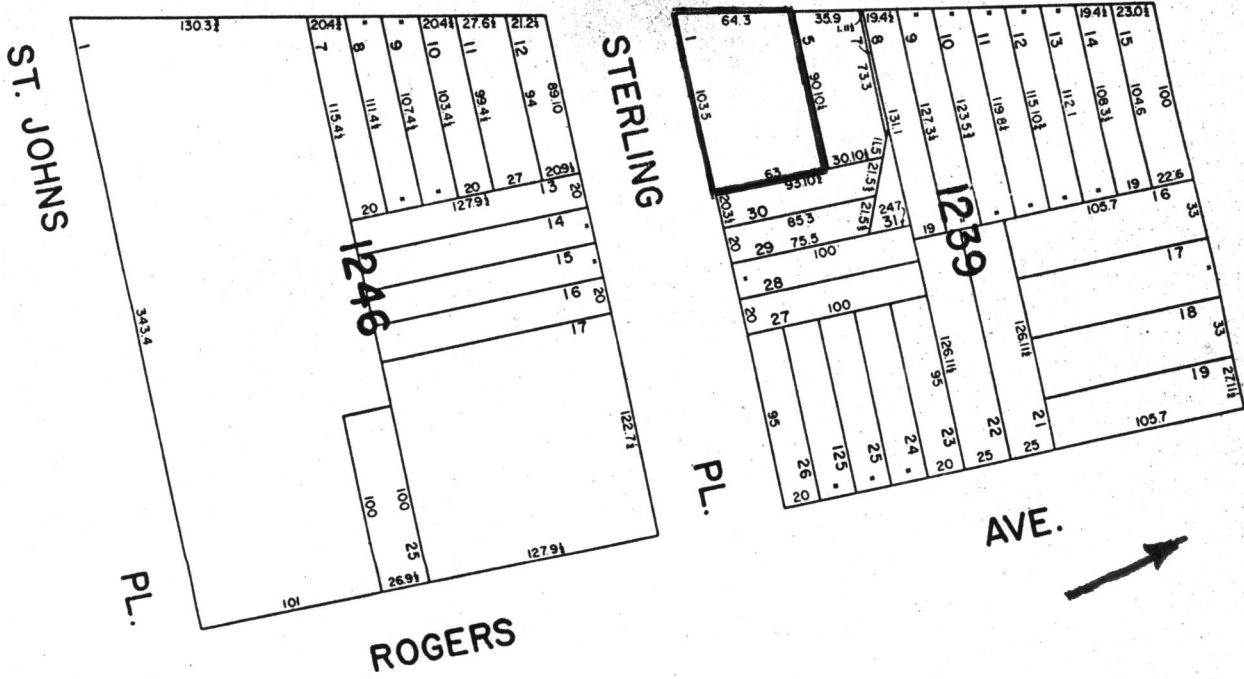




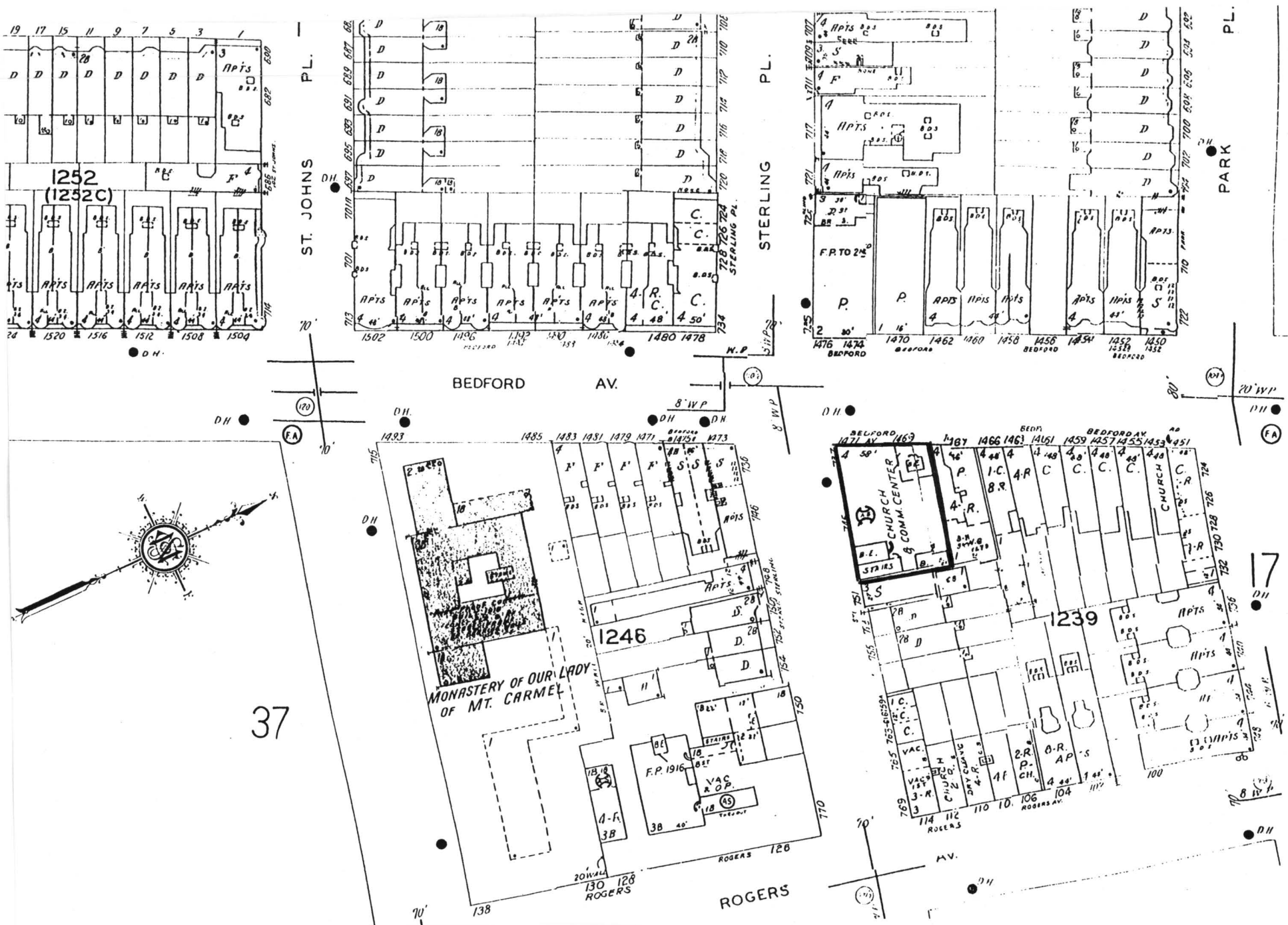
BEDFORD



AVE.



Studebaker Building  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1239, Lot 1  
 Source: Sanborn, *Brooklyn Land Map* (1998)



Studebaker Building  
 Source: Sanborn, *Brooklyn Land Book* (1998), vol. 7, pl.34