

AEOLIAN BUILDING (later **ELIZABETH ARDEN BUILDING**), 689-691 Fifth Avenue (aka 1 East 54th Street), Manhattan. Built 1925-27; [Whitney] Warren & [Charles D.] Wetmore, architects; James Baird Construction Co., builder.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1290, Lot 1.

On October 8, 2002, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three people spoke in favor of designation: representatives of the property's owners, Assemblyman Richard N. Gottfried, and Historic Districts Council. In addition, the Commission received a resolution in support of designation from Community Board 5.

Summary

The Aeolian Building was constructed in 1925-27 to the design of architects Warren & Wetmore for the Gould Realty Co., controlled by Commodore Charles A. Gould, a wealthy iron and steel manufacturer and property owner (who died in 1926). Awarded a gold medal by the Fifth Avenue Association prior to its completion, the building was sold at public auction in 1927 and acquired as an investment by Gould's daughter, Celia Gould Milne, who retained it until 1944. The building was leased until 1938 as the headquarters of the Aeolian Co., a leading manufacturer of roll-operated instruments. The firm of Warren & Wetmore is best known for its designs for hotels and railroad-related buildings, notably Grand Central Terminal. Designed in a restrained and graceful neo-Classical style with French Renaissance style detailing, the Aeolian Building is clad in Indiana limestone with Italian marble spandrel panels, and buff-colored terra cotta on the upper portion. Following the requirements of the 1916 Zoning Resolution, it rises nine stories before setting back on the tenth, twelfth, and fourteenth stories. The corner of the building is rounded on the lower nine stories, while the upper portions feature angles and concave curves. Bronze and carved garlands and other decorative elements adorn the structure, and large urns surmount the ninth story. A tower with a pyramidal roof (covered in copper) with a lantern rises in front of a two-story penthouse/mechanical section. The building was called by Paul Goldberger in the *New York Times* in 1984 "a lyrical... gem... that may be the city's most inventive merging of modern commercial design with French and classical architectural detail... as good a reminder as New York has that architecture can be exuberant and fanciful yet discreet and well-mannered."



Historic Photo

Since 1930, this has been the location of the flagship Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon. Florence Nightingale Graham (1878-1966) took the professional name of Elizabeth Arden in 1910 when she opened a Fifth Avenue salon. One of the pioneers of the women's cosmetics and beauty business, she became one of the most successful American businesswomen of all time. Elizabeth Arden, Inc., owned this building from 1944 to 1969.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Aeolian Building¹

In February 1925, the Gould Realty Co. purchased the property that was the site of the William G. Rockefeller² residence (1876) at the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and East 54th Street. The parcel, considered by the *New York Times* “one of the most valuable in the section” of upper Fifth Avenue,³ sold for \$1.6 million.⁴ The Gould Realty Co. was controlled by Commodore Charles Albert Gould (1849-1926), a wealthy iron and steel manufacturer and New York property owner. Born in Batavia, New York, Gould began a career as an accountant and Republican politician in Buffalo. He acquired a steam forge in 1884, then built his own iron and steel forge three years later. Gould decided to specialize in the manufacture of iron and steel products for railroads. He established the Gould Coupler Co. (to make automatic railroad car couplers) in New York and the Gould Steel Co. in Indiana in 1892. The malleable iron and steel works were relocated after 1895 to a large tract in a new town, later called Depew, New York, when it was joined by the yards and shops of the New York Central Railroad. After Gould’s move to New York City, he founded the Gould Realty Co. and Gould Securities Co. to handle his real estate acquisitions, which were worth nearly \$7 million at the time of his death. Gould commissioned a new facade for his former residence at 714 Fifth Avenue (1907-08, Woodruff Leeming); the building was leased in 1910 to perfumer Francois Coty as his American headquarters.⁵ Among Gould’s other properties were No. 126-128 Fifth Avenue (1905-06, Robert Maynicke) and No. 396-398 Broadway (1898-99, William H. Birkmire).⁶

In March 1925, it was announced that the Aeolian Co., a leading manufacturer of roll-operated instruments, had signed a 63-year lease for \$12 million and would occupy most of the new building to be constructed by Gould, with display spaces for instruments, a small recital hall, executive offices, a library, and an artists’ room. The proposed building was initially described as in the “Francis I” style.⁷ Warren & Wetmore, the architects of Aeolian Hall (1912-13), 33 West 42nd Street, and, more recently, Steinway Hall (1924-25), 109-113 West 57th Street, for the Steinway & Sons piano company, were selected as architects and filed in July 1925 for a fourteen-story building, expected to cost \$1 million. Construction began in October 1925, with the James Baird Construction Co. as builder. Commodore Gould died, however, in January 1926. The Aeolian Building was awarded a gold medal, for best new building within

the Fifth Avenue district, by the Fifth Avenue Association at the end of 1926. The *Real Estate Record & Guide* opined that

*The new Aeolian Building is a graceful addition to the music and art center which dominates the development of upper Fifth Avenue in the neighborhood of Fifty-seventh Street. Every effort was made by the architects to design a structure in keeping with the traditions of the Aeolian Company... and at the same time expressive of the relation of their interests to the musical arts. This desire, together with the necessity for erecting a practical and modern office and studio building, produced the present structure.*⁸

The building was completed in January 1927, at a cost of about \$1.55 million.⁹ At its dedication in February 1927, architect Whitney Warren expressed the hope that the building conveyed something of a sense of “a little rest, a little peace, a simplicity complete, a dream realized” on Fifth Avenue, while Michael Friedsam, president of the Fifth Avenue Association, stated that “this splendid building is a Fifth Avenue-New York message of inspiration and good-will to the country. Such beautiful structures as this insure to our common country the commercial leadership of the world.”¹⁰ The building was featured in *Architecture & Building* and *The Architect* in 1927.

Designed in a restrained and graceful neo-Classical style with French Renaissance style detailing, the Aeolian Building is clad in Indiana limestone with Italian marble spandrel panels, and a buff-colored terra-cotta-clad upper portion. The terra cotta was manufactured by the Federal Terra Cotta Co.¹¹ Following the 1916 Zoning Resolution, the building rises nine stories before setting back on the tenth, twelfth, and fourteenth stories. The corner of the building is rounded on the lower nine stories, while the upper portions feature angles and concave curves. Bronze and carved garlands and other decorative elements adorn the structure, window sash and frames are bronze, and large urns surmount the ninth story. A tower with a pyramidal roof (covered in copper) with an open lantern rises in front of a two-story penthouse and mechanical floor section.

The Aeolian Building demonstrates Warren & Wetmore’s success in the design of setbacks and picturesque towers. Because few buildings were constructed in New York City during World War I and the following recession, tall buildings erected in the

1920s, such as this building, were among the first to reflect the provisions of the Zoning Resolution, including setbacks on the upper stories. Skyscraper architects, including Warren & Wetmore, thus became “sculptors in building masses,” as remarked by architect Harvey Wiley Corbett.¹² The curved and angled upper portions and the tower that cap the Aeolian Building follow in the long tradition in New York of tall buildings with embellished terminations. The graceful classical style, materials, setbacks and massing, picturesque upper portions and tower, and ornamentation add distinction to the Aeolian Building and make it a monumental architectural presence along the commercial and cultural corridor of Fifth Avenue in the 50s. The building was called by Paul Goldberger in the *New York Times* in 1984

*a lyrical... gem... that may be the city's most inventive merging of modern commercial design with French and classical architectural detail... as good a reminder as New York has that architecture can be exuberant and fanciful yet discreet and well-mannered.*¹³

Under the stipulations of Commodore Gould's will, his various properties were sold at auction, in January 1927. The *New York Times* commented that “this is believed to be the first time on record that a gold medal building has ever been offered at absolute public auction.”¹⁴ One of the most widely noted auctions of its type, attended by many prominent real estate operators, the properties garnered a total of some \$6.7 million for the Gould Estate. The Aeolian Building was acquired as an investment by his daughter, Celia Adelaide Gould Milne, for \$3 million, leading the *Times* to note that “the price paid for the property establishes a new square foot value of \$432 for land and building in that vicinity.”¹⁵ In February 1927, the property was conveyed by the Gould Estate to the Milne Security and Realty Corp. That entity, and its subsidiary, the 689 Fifth Avenue Corp., owned the building until 1944.¹⁶

The Architects: Warren & Wetmore¹⁷

Whitney Warren (1864-1943), born in New York City, studied architectural drawing privately, attended Columbia College for a time, and continued his studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1885 to 1894. Upon his return to New York, he worked in the office of McKim, Mead & White. One of Warren's country house clients was Charles Delavan Wetmore. Born in Elmira, New York, Wetmore (1866-1941) was a graduate of Harvard University (1889) and Harvard Law School (1892), who had also studied architecture

and had designed three dormitory buildings (c. 1890) on that campus before joining a law firm. Impressed by his client's architectural ability, Warren persuaded Wetmore to leave law and to establish Warren & Wetmore in 1898. While Warren was the principal designer of the firm and used his social connections to provide it with clients, Wetmore became the legal and financial specialist. Whitney Warren was also a founder of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects and the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design.

Warren & Wetmore became a highly successful and prolific, largely commercial architectural firm, best known for its designs for hotels and for buildings commissioned by railroad companies. The firm's work was concentrated in New York City during the first three decades of the twentieth century, but it also received projects across the United States and overseas. The designs were mainly variations of the neo-Classical idiom, including essays in the Beaux-Arts and neo-Renaissance styles. Warren & Wetmore's first major commission, the result of a competition, was the flamboyant New York Yacht Club (1899-1900), 37 West 44th Street. Early residences by the firm included town houses on the Upper East Side, such as the Marshall Orme Wilson House (1900-03), 3 East 64th Street; James A. and Florence S. Burden House (1902-05), 7 East 91st Street; and R. Livingston and Eleanor T. Beeckman House (1903-05), 854 Fifth Avenue.¹⁸ The firm of Warren & Wetmore was responsible for the design of the facades of the Chelsea Piers (1902-10, demolished) along the Hudson River between Little West 12th and West 23rd Streets; the Vanderbilt Hotel (1910-13), 4 Park Avenue, including the Della Robbia Bar (with R. Guastavino Co. and Rookwood Pottery Co.); Aeolian Hall (1912-13); and a number of luxury apartment houses, such as No. 903 Park Avenue (1912).

Warren & Wetmore is most notably associated with the design of Grand Central Terminal (1903-13, with Reed & Stem and William J. Wilgus, engineer), East 42nd Street and Park Avenue, as well as a number of other projects in its vicinity. Whitney Warren was the cousin of William K. Vanderbilt, chairman of the board of the New York Central Railroad, who was responsible for the firm's selection as chief designers. Nearby development by the firm over the span of two decades included: Hotel Belmont (1905-06, demolished); Ritz-Carlton Hotel (1910, demolished); Biltmore Hotel (1912-14, significantly altered), Vanderbilt Avenue and East 43rd Street; Park Avenue Viaduct (designed 1912, built 1917-19); Commodore Hotel (1916-19, significantly altered), 125 East 42nd Street; Equitable Trust Co. Building (1917-18), 347-

355 Madison Avenue; Hotel Ambassador (1921, demolished); and New York Central Building (1927-29), 230 Park Avenue.¹⁹ With the firm's success with Grand Central Terminal came commissions for other railroad stations for the New York Central, Michigan Central, Canadian Northern, and Erie Railroads. Notable among these are the Fort Gary Station (1909), Winnipeg, Canada; Yonkers Railroad Station (1911); Union Station (1911-12), Houston; and Michigan Central Station (1913-14, with Reed & Stem), Detroit.

The firm's later work displayed an increased interest in the "composition of architectural mass."²⁰ Prominent later commissions included the Heckscher Building (1920-21), 730 Fifth Avenue; Plaza Hotel addition (1921), 2 Central Park South; Steinway Hall (1924-25); Aeolian Building (1925-27); Tower Building (1926), 200 Madison Avenue; Consolidated Edison Co. Building Tower (1926), 4 Irving Place; Erlanger Theater (1926-27), 246-256 West 44th Street;²¹ and Stewart & Co. Building (1929, demolished), 721-725 Fifth Avenue. The Heckscher, Steinway, Aeolian, and Consolidated Edison Buildings, in particular, show the firm's success in its use of setbacks and picturesque towers. Little was constructed by the firm after 1930. Whitney Warren retired from Warren & Wetmore in 1931, but remained a consulting architect. Charles Wetmore was the firm's senior partner until the end of his life.

James Baird Construction Co., Builder²²

The James Baird Construction Co. was established in New York City in 1925. James Baird (1873-1953), born in Kentucky, received a degree in civil engineering from the University of Michigan (1896). In 1899-1900, he was employed as a superintendent by the George A. Fuller Co. (founded in Chicago in 1882 by George Allon Fuller) and, in 1900-01, by the Thompson Starrett Co., both in New York. He returned to the Fuller Co. in 1902, and worked in the branch office in Boston. The George A. Fuller Co. moved its headquarters to New York and became a major force in the construction and promotion of tall office buildings in the city. The firm's offices were in the Fuller Building, better known as the Flatiron Building (1901-03, D.H. Burnham & Co.), Fifth Avenue and 23rd Street,²³ for which Baird was credited with directing construction. From 1904 to 1910, he was in charge of the firm's work in Washington, D.C., and throughout the southeastern United States. Baird served as vice president of the Fuller concern from 1910 to 1922, and as president in 1922-24. He directed construction of the Commodore Hotel, and the Lincoln Memorial (1912-22, Henry Bacon), Washington, D.C. The James Baird Construction Co., of which Baird

was president until his death, was responsible for the erection of the Aeolian Building; Freer Gallery of Art (1923-28, Charles A. Platt), and Folger Shakespeare Library (1928-32, Paul Cret), Washington, D.C.; and the Brooklyn Printing Plant of the *New York Times* (1929-30, Albert Kahn), 59-75 Third Avenue. Baird moved to Arizona in 1933. He directed construction of temporary World War II buildings in Washington and elsewhere.

Fifth Avenue and West 57th Street: Commercial and Cultural Center²⁴

For most of the nineteenth century, successive portions of Fifth Avenue enjoyed the reputation of being New York's most prestigious residential enclave. As the avenue was developed northward from Washington Square, its character reflected the growth and change of Manhattan, with newer northerly residential sections followed closely by commercial redevelopment. After the Civil War, Fifth Avenue between 42nd and 59th Streets was built up with town houses and mansions for New York's elite, yet by the turn of the century profound commercial change had occurred. One writer in 1907 commented that "among the many radical changes which have been brought about during the past six years in New York City, the most radical and the most significant are those which have taken place on Fifth Avenue. That thoroughfare has been completely transformed."²⁵ Fifth Avenue became an elegant boulevard of prestigious retail shops, department stores, luxury hotels, and elite social clubs, as well as the center of American fashion. In the vicinity of the Aeolian Building are the St. Regis Hotel (1901-04, Trowbridge & Livingston; 1927, Sloan & Robertson), 699-703 Fifth Avenue; University Club (1896-1900, McKim, Mead & White), 1 West 54th Street; and Gotham Hotel (1902-05, Hiss & Weekes), 696-700 Fifth Avenue.²⁶

West 57th Street, particularly the blocks between Sixth Avenue and Broadway, also had a distinguished history, but one associated with the arts for over a century. As residences for the wealthy were constructed along Fifth Avenue and adjacent blocks, several early apartment houses were built on West 57th Street in the 1880s that provided large studio space for artists, paving the way for the neighborhood's eventual reputation as an artistic center. Carnegie Hall (1889-91, William B. Tuthill), at the southeast corner of Seventh Avenue, became one of the nation's most legendary concert halls.²⁷ The American Fine Arts Society Building (1891-92, Henry J. Hardenbergh), 215 West 57th Street, has been home to the Architectural League, Art Students League, and Society of American Artists, providing exhibition,

classroom, and studio facilities; it was the site of “virtually every important exhibition of art and architecture held in the city”²⁸ for many years. By the time the Louis H. Chalif Normal School of Dancing (1916, G.A. & H. Boehm), one of the earliest American schools to instruct teachers in dance, was built at 163-165 West 57th Street, it was said that the neighborhood “abounds in structures devoted to the cultivation of the arts.”²⁹ As indicated in the Federal Writers’ Project’s *New York City Guide* in 1939, “the completion of Carnegie Hall in 1891 established the district as the foremost musical center of the country. Manufacturers of musical instruments, especially pianos, opened impressive showrooms along Fifty-seventh Street.”³⁰ These included Chickering Hall (1924, Cross & Cross), 29 West 57th Street, and Steinway Hall.

Aeolian Company³¹

At the turn of the century, self-playing organs gained popularity among the wealthy in the United States and Europe. Automatic player organs, pianos, and other instruments (mostly for residential use) remained popular throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, and New York became a center for their manufacture. Powered by foot pedals, the instruments’ music was achieved through perforated paper rolls. New York City piano maker William B. Tremaine established the Mechanical Organette Co. (1878) to manufacture automated reed organs. He later founded the Aeolian Organ & Music Co. (1887) to make automatic organs; known as the Aeolian Co. after 1895, it also made automatic pianos. The pianola, a pneumatic player piano, was invented in 1895 by Edwin S. Votey, president of the Farrand & Votey Organ Co., Detroit. Votey joined Aeolian in 1897 and the firm obtained the patent for his invention (1900), which became immensely popular. In 1903, Tremaine organized the Aeolian, Weber Piano & Pianola Co. to absorb a number of manufacturers of self-playing instruments (pianos, reed organs, and automatic organs), including the [Albert] Weber Co., maker of pianos in New York since 1852. The Aeolian Co. remained a major subsidiary. The pianola was later supplanted by Aeolian’s “Duo Art” reproducing piano (1913), which could replicate the sound of a famous artist playing and required no manual intervention. The Aeolian, Weber Piano & Pianola Co. became the world’s leading manufacturer of roll-operated instruments.

In the 1920s, Aeolian attempted to branch out into the manufacture of organs for churches and concert halls. But with the onset of the Depression and the resultant loss of its residential market base, Aeolian

ceased its organ manufacturing in 1930 and sold these assets. As the era of the player piano faded with the rising popularity of the gramophone and radio, the Aeolian, Weber Piano & Pianola Co. merged in 1932 with the American Piano Corp. to form the Aeolian American Corp. The American Piano Co. had been organized in 1908 through the consolidation of Chickering & Sons, Boston; Knabe & Co., Baltimore; and a number of other piano companies. Its player piano division was formed in 1909, and its “Ampico” system competed directly with Aeolian’s “Duo Art” pianos. The firm became the American Piano Corp. in 1930. The Aeolian American Corp. became the Aeolian Corp. in 1959; it declared bankruptcy in 1985.

Aeolian’s first location was at 841 Broadway, near Union Square, in the heart of the piano district; the company later moved uptown to 23rd Street, and then to 360 Fifth Avenue. Aeolian Hall (1912-13), 33 West 42nd Street, housed the firm’s general offices and demonstration rooms showcasing its instruments, as well as a recital hall on the 43rd Street side where many noted musicians performed. The building was sold by Aeolian in 1924. William H. Alfring, vice president /general manager, was quoted in 1925 in the *New York Times*: “We had a sentimental urge to return to Fifth Avenue, not only for Albert Weber’s early association, but because the Aeolian Company was the first to erect a fine building north of Twenty-third Street, when it built at Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue.”³² The firm’s facilities in the new Aeolian Building included a shipping department in the basement, with a truck lift to the ground level; a showroom for its pianos and organs on the ground story, with a corner entrance; demonstration rooms on the lower six stories; a small second-story recital hall for 150; and recording studios for Duo Art records (rolls), offices, design studios, drafting rooms, and a director’s room in the upper stories. The Aeolian Co. (Aeolian American Corp.) only remained in the Aeolian Building until 1938,³³ when it leased half of Chickering Hall on West 57th Street.

Elizabeth Arden³⁴

Since 1930, the Aeolian Building has been the location of the flagship Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon. Florence Nightingale Graham (1878-1966), one of the pioneers of the women’s cosmetics and beauty business and one of the most successful female entrepreneurs in American history, was born near Toronto, Canada. By legend, during a short stint as a nurse she became interested in medicinal creams for beauty purposes. She moved to New York City around 1908, following her brother, and found a job with facial massage specialist Eleanor Adair. Graham took

the professional name of Elizabeth Arden in 1910 when she opened her own salon at 509 Fifth Avenue. She foresaw the potential profits in cosmetics and her fortune early on was based on her pursuit in developing a light “fluffy” facial cream, which was achieved by chemist A. Fabian Swanson in 1914 as Cream Amoretta. This was followed by an astringent, Ardena Skin Tonic, and later by the popular Velva Moisture Film. From 1915 to 1920, she was said to have “introduced a larger number of preparations, of greater diversification of use, than any other cosmetics manufacturer in the world.”³⁵ Arden moved her salon farther north to 673 Fifth Avenue in 1915 (where she is credited with introducing mascara and eye shadow to Americans in 1917), and also opened a wholesale cosmetics branch for department and drug stores. Arden’s marriage in 1915 to banker Thomas Jenkins Lewis provided her with American citizenship; he became her general manager, greatly assisting in the development of her wholesale business from 1918 until their divorce in 1934. Branch salons were established in Washington, D.C. (1914), Boston, and Paris (1922), as well as a luxury spa (1934) at her farm, Maine Chance, in Maine.³⁶ Arden achieved entree into New York society through her close friendship with Elisabeth Marbury, one of the world’s leading (and pioneering female) theatrical agents. *Fortune* in 1938 wrote that Arden “built her business on swank, ultraexclusiveness and a line beautifully packaged and styled.”³⁷ The *New York Times* credited Arden with making cosmetics acceptable for “respectable” middle-aged women by “helping to create and popularize creams, lotions and oils -- and salons at fashionable addresses in which they could be professionally applied. ... She was a pioneer in advertising beauty products in fashion magazines and newspapers.”³⁸

Elizabeth Arden leased part of the ground story and five upper floors of the Aeolian Building in August 1929. A new black marble storefront, at the north end of the Fifth Avenue facade, was designed by architect Mott B. Schmidt.³⁹ The Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon, with “treatment rooms, rooms for exercise, tap dancing, and rooms for the use of the electric mask treatments and other innovations,”⁴⁰ opened in January 1930. The Federal Writers’ Project’s *New York City Guide* in 1939 called Elizabeth Arden’s (and nemesis Helena Rubinstein’s, at 715 Fifth Avenue) “among the most luxurious beauty salons in the country.”⁴¹ Even through the Depression and World War II, her firm remained very profitable. In 1944, Elizabeth Arden, Inc., acquired control of the 689 Fifth Ave. Corp. from the Milne family, owning the building until 1969 and eventually

occupying eleven floors. *Time* magazine noted in 1946 that Arden “made femininity a science and made more money doing it... than any business woman in history”⁴² and that “the grand showcase of the Arden beauty empire at 691 Fifth Avenue is guarded by a grey-liveried doorman and a red door marked simply, Elizabeth Arden.”⁴³ In 1956, she opened a pioneering men’s boutique in this building. Arden personally reigned over her empire until her death in 1966 at age 88, and was sole owner of her business. Her estate was estimated at between 30 and 50 million dollars. Elizabeth Arden, Inc., and Elizabeth Arden Sales Corp. at that time operated a billion-dollar global business which included fifty large “full-treatment” salons in major cities and at two resorts, and another fifty smaller salons for facials and hair styling, as well as the manufacture and sale of hundreds of cosmetics products and clothing. Miss Arden, however, had made no provision for the continuation of her firm after her death. The U.S. government soon claimed some \$37 million in inheritance and corporate taxes. Elizabeth Arden was acquired in 1970 by Eli Lilly & Co., and was later purchased by Unilever in 1990. It was again sold in 2001 to FFI Fragrances (formerly French Fragrances, Inc.), which changed its name to Elizabeth Arden, Inc.

Aeolian (Elizabeth Arden) Building Tenants and Owners (1938 to present)⁴⁴

After the Aeolian Co. ended its lease in 1938, the lower two stories of the building were remodeled by architect Robert Carson for an I. Miller & Sons shoe store, which opened in June 1939. The original limestone pilasters and second-story marble window surrounds were removed and light grey-yellow marble cladding and new ground-story show windows and a corner entrance were installed; second-story cusped windows and bronze garlands were retained. Israel Miller (1866-1929), a Polish-born shoe manufacturer and merchant, established his business in New York City in 1895, which was almost exclusively for the theatrical profession. I. Miller footwear also became fashionable for society women, leading him into the retail trade in 1911, with a store at 1554 Broadway.⁴⁵ At the time of his death, I. Miller had 228 branch stores across the nation, including four in New York. This store, I Miller & Sons’ third location on Fifth Avenue and fifth in New York, remained here until 1970.

The upper stories of the Aeolian (Elizabeth Arden) Building have housed a wide variety of businesses over the years, including furs, textiles, watches, carpets, wallpaper, perfumes, men’s and women’s apparel, jewelry, exercise equipment,

industrial design, publishers' representatives, public relations, advertising, marketing, and a fashion modeling school. Several media firms have leased the upper portions of the building: Transamerican Broadcasting and Television Corp., audition and commercial radio program studios (1939-50s); Olmsted Sound Studios, television producers (1954-65); and Robert Saudek Assocs., Inc., movie and television producers (1966-70s). Saudek (1911- 1998) had been the producer of the influential television program *Omnibus* (1952-61), considered a precursor to public television. The building has also housed several organizations: the Pacific and American Councils of the Institute of Pacific Relations (1943-50s), founded in 1925 to improve relations between nations occupying the Pacific region; Greater New York chapter, National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (1948-66), founded in 1938 and later known as the March of Dimes; and Fund for the Republic (1953-c. 1958), a non-profit subsidiary of the Ford Foundation established in 1952 for the defense of civil rights and liberties during the McCarthy era.

The building was acquired in 1969 by Arden-Esquire Realty Co. (Larry Silverstein and Bernard Mendik, partners). The ground story was remodeled with travertine marble and stainless steel in 1970 by Ernest Castro (Weissberg Castro Assocs.) for Dr. Aldo Gucci, purveyor of Italian shoes and handbags. The company begun by his father, Guccio Gucci, in Florence in 1921 as a saddlery and luggage business was continued by his three sons in 1939 and expanded within Italy. Gucci opened its first foreign shop in New York in 1953, at Fifth Avenue and 58th Street. The Aeolian (Elizabeth Arden) Building was the location of Gucci's main New York store from 1970 to 1980, after which it was a branch store for luggage and shoes when a galleria store opened across the street at 685 Fifth Avenue.

In 1999, the building was conveyed to 689 Fifth Avenue LLC, a subsidiary of Vornado Realty Trust.

Description

The fourteen-story (plus penthouse and tower) Aeolian Building is L-shaped in plan, with a Fifth Avenue frontage of about fifty feet and an East 54th Street frontage of 125 feet, and is designed in a neo-Classical style with French Renaissance style detailing. The midsection is clad in Indiana limestone with Italian marble spandrel panels, while the upper portion (above the thirteenth story) is clad in a buff-colored terra cotta. The building rises nine stories before setting back on the tenth, twelfth, and fourteenth stories. The facades are articulated vertically by continuous pilasters from the third

through the ninth or eleventh stories. The corner of the building is rounded on the lower nine stories, while the upper portions feature angles and concave curves. A tower with a pyramidal roof and lantern rises in front of a two-story penthouse and mechanical floor section. Original windows have mostly six-over-six double-hung bronze sash and frames.

Base (First and second stories) The non-historic ground story is the result of a complete remodeling in 1970, with travertine marble cladding and stainless steel storefront, for Gucci. The base originally had a pink granite watertable; limestone pilasters; ground-story doorways, rectangular show windows, and canopies, all of bronze; and marble surrounds at the second-story windows. A black marble storefront was designed for Elizabeth Arden (1929, Mott B. Schmidt) at the north end of the Fifth Avenue facade. In 1939, the rest of the base was remodeled for I. Miller & Sons: limestone pilasters and second-story marble surrounds were replaced by a light grey-yellow marble cladding, and new ground-story show windows and a corner entrance were installed; second-story cusped windows and bronze garlands and the modillioned limestone cornice were retained. **Fifth Avenue:** The non-historic ground-story Elizabeth Arden shop at the north end has a red door surmounted by an oval design window set within a brass frame. The non-historic southern storefront is set behind the piers and has a curved corner entrance. Awnings are placed over each opening. The second-story cornice bears the metal letters "ELIZABETH ARDEN". **54th Street:** From west to east, the ground story has: the corner entrance; four show windows; a bay with louvers; and an inset building entrance, with metal arched reveal, green marble floor and walls, glass and metal doors and transom, a hanging lamp, and louvers.

Midsection (Third through ninth stories) The base of each of the building's pilasters at the third story is ornamented by a carved disk plaque (half of them are surmounted by urns). Third-story windows have balusters and are surmounted by entablatures. Three flagpoles have been installed on the third-story Fifth Avenue facade. Windows of the easternmost bay of the 54th Street facade have louvers inserted. Air conditioning louvers have been inserted below ninth-story windows. The ninth-story 54th Street facade is ornamented with carved plaques. The ninth story is capped by a decorative limestone balustrade surmounted by large urns at the corners; there is a decorative central balcony on each facade.

Upper Section (Tenth through fourteenth stories) The tenth and eleventh stories are set back at the corners of the building, with concave-curved and angled walls that connect to the central section of each facade,

which extends above the lower facade plane. Each central section, flanked by scroll brackets, has two-story round-arched windows (single on Fifth Avenue and triple on 54th Street) with multi-pane sash, surmounted by keystones and carved garlands. Air conditioning louvers have been inserted below eleventh-story windows. The eleventh story is capped by a modillioned cornice and parapet. The set back twelfth and thirteenth stories have an angled bay on 54th Street and are articulated with two-story round arches, set within which are windows with molded surrounds. The thirteenth story is capped by a balustrade. The set back terra-cotta-clad fourteenth story is capped by a pierced parapet.

Tower The terra-cotta-clad tower is ornamented with round arches (set within which are windows surmounted by oculi) surmounted by keystones and garlands. Chamfered corners are surmounted by decorative shells. The pyramidal roof and open lantern are covered with copper, originally embellished with gold leaf decoration. **Penthouse/Mechanical Section** This two-story terra-cotta-clad section extends eastward from the tower and is pierced by windows.

Report prepared by
JAY SHOCKLEY
 Research Department

NOTES

1. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; NYC, Dept. of Buildings, Manhattan, Plans, Permits and Dockets (NB 435-1925); "Charles Albert Gould," *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography (NCAB)* 21 (N.Y.: James T. White & Co., 1931), 395; LPC, *Coty Building Designation Report (LP-1534)* (N.Y.: City of New York, 1985), prepared by Marjorie Pearson; Aeolian Building south elevation blueprint (c. 1925), courtesy of Vornado Realty Trust; "Real Estate Transaction...," *New York Times (NYT)*, Sept. 9, 1923, real est. 1; "Aeolian Co. to Have Fifth Avenue Home," *NYT*, Apr. 1, 1925, 48; "New Aeolian Home in French Style," *NYT*, Apr. 5, 1925, XII, 1; "\$6,000,000 Realty of Gould to be Sold," *NYT*, Nov. 22, 1926, 1; "Medals are Awarded for Best Buildings," *NYT*, Dec. 17, 1926, 21; "Fifth Avenue Association Makes Annual Medal Awards," *Real Estate Record & Guide (REMG)*, Dec. 18, 1926, 7; "Award Medals for Finest Buildings," *NYT*, Dec. 19, 1926, X, 1; "Gold Medal Auction Arouses Comment," *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1926, X, 2; "12 Gould Buildings Go for \$6,714,000," *NYT*, Jan. 25, 1927, 1; "Aeolian Co. Gives Golden Key to City," *NYT*, Feb. 24, 1927, 11; "The New Aeolian Building New York City," *Architecture & Building* (May 1927), 146-147 and pl.; "The Aeolian Building," *The Architect* (June 1927), 335-345; "C.A. Gould Estate is \$12,768,505 Net," *NYT*, Nov. 19, 1927, 19; Carter B. Horsley, "The Aeolian Building: A Bit of Paris on 5th Ave.," *NYT*, Jan. 14, 1979, real est. 6.
2. William G. Rockefeller (1841-1922) went into the oil business with his brother, John D., in 1866 and was one of the founders of the Standard Oil Co. He was president of the Standard Oil Co. of New York from 1882 to 1911. His fortune, also made in railroads, copper, public utilities, and banking, was worth between 150 and 200 million dollars at his death. He had successfully thwarted the expansion of the St. Regis Hotel and other commercial development adjacent to his residence through the purchase of additional lots on the block. "William Rockefeller," *Dictionary of American Biography (DAB)* 8 (N.Y.: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1935), 65-66.
3. Sept. 9, 1923.
4. *NYT*, Nov. 19, 1927.
5. The Coty Building, a designated New York City Landmark, has unique windows designed (c. 1910) by the great French glassmaker Rene Lalique.
6. No. 126-128 Fifth Avenue is within the Ladies' Mile Historic District and No. 396-398 Broadway is within the Tribeca East Historic District.
7. *NYT*, Apr. 5, 1925.

8. Dec. 18, 1926.
9. *NYT*, Nov. 19, 1927.
10. *NYT*, Feb. 24, 1927.
11. The Federal Terra Cotta Co., organized at the end of 1909 by DeForest Grant, began manufacturing terra cotta in 1910 from its Woodbridge, N.J., plant. Among Manhattan buildings that employ Federal terra cotta (all designated New York City Landmarks) are the Whitehall Building addition (1908-10, Clinton & Russell), 17 Battery Place; Equitable Building (1913-15, Ernest Graham & Assocs.), 120 Broadway; and Louis H. Chalif Normal School of Dancing (1916, G.A. & H. Boehm), 163-165 West 57th Street. This company was joined in 1928 with the South Amboy and New Jersey Terra Cotta Companies to form the Federal Seaboard Terra Cotta Corp. See: Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline: New York's Architectural Ornament* (N.Y.: Princeton Archl. Pr., 1997), 138.
12. Cited in Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1987), 509.
13. Paul Goldberger, "5th Ave., at Its Brightest, Sees Shadows of Change," *NYT*, Dec. 15, 1984, 29.
14. Dec. 26, 1926.
15. Jan. 25, 1927.
16. Celia Gould Milne died in 1948. Celia G. Milne obit. listing, *NYT*, Oct. 11, 1948, 23.
17. Dennis S. Francis, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1840-1900* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1979), 80-81; James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1989), 82, 84; LPC, Architects files; Dennis McFadden, "Warren & Wetmore," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* 4 (N.Y.: Free Pr., 1982), 377; Warren obit., *NYT* and *New York Herald-Tribune (NYHT)*, Jan. 25, 1943; Wetmore obit., *NYT*, May 9, 1941, and *NYHT*, May 10, 1941; "Whitney Warren" and "Charles D. Wetmore," *NCAB* 34 and 42 (1947 and 1958), 173-174 and 213-214; Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, *New York 1900* (N.Y.: Rizzoli Intl. Publs., 1983); *New York 1930*; Janet G. Potter, *Great American Railroad Stations* (N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996).
18. The New York Yacht Club and Burden and Beeckman Houses are designated New York City Landmarks. The Wilson House is located within the Upper East Side Historic District.
19. Grand Central Terminal is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark. Pershing Viaduct and the New York Central Building are designated New York City Landmarks.
20. McFadden.
21. The Della Robbia Bar is a designated New York City Interior Landmark. The Plaza Hotel and Steinway Hall are designated New York City Landmarks. The Erlanger Theater is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.
22. "The New Aeolian Building ...," 146; Baird obit., *NYT*, May 17, 1953, 89; "James Baird," *NCAB* 42 (1958), 472-473.
23. The Flatiron Building is a designated New York City Landmark and is included within the Ladies' Mile Historic District.
24. Adapted from: LPC, *Coty Building Designation Report*, and Louis H. Chalif Normal School of Dancing Designation Report (LP-2041)(N.Y.: City of New York, 1999), prepared by Jay Shockley.

25. A.C. David, "The New Fifth Avenue," *Architectural Record* (July 1907), 1.
26. All of these building are designated New York City Landmarks.
27. Residential studios were added to the building in 1896-97 (Henry J. Hardenbergh). Carnegie Hall is a designated New York City Landmark.
28. *New York 1900*, 104. The American Fine Arts Society Building is a designated New York City Landmark.
29. *REG*, Apr. 15, 1916, 595.
30. Federal Writers' Project, *New York City Guide* (N.Y.: Octagon Bks., 1939), 232.
31. "Aeolian," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan Publr. Ltd., 2001), 172-173; Votey obit., *NYT*, Jan. 22, 1931, 18; "The Player Piano Page," www.pianola.com website; "Piano 300: A Chronological Timeline," www.piano300.org website; "Manufacturers and Manufacturing: Musical Instruments," in William T. Bonner, *New York The World's Metropolis 1623-4 -- 1923-4* (N.Y.: R.L. Polk & Co., Inc., 1924), 530-531; "Aeolian Company Sells Its Building," *NYT*, Aug. 1, 1924, 14; "Aeolian to Move to West 57th St.," *NYT*, Jan. 24, 1938, 34.
32. Apr. 1, 1925. The Weber Co. was located at Fifth Avenue and 16th Street in 1869.
33. Among the associated companies listed in directories were the Aeolian Co., Chilton Piano Co., Melodes Music Roll Co., Pianola Co., Stuyvesant Piano Co., Universal Music Co., Votey Organ Co., Weber Piano Co., Wheelock Piano Co., Aeolian American Corp., Mason & Hamlin Piano Co., Standard Pneumatic Action Corp., Chickering & Sons, and Aeolian-Skinner Organ Co.
34. "Elizabeth Arden," *Current Biography Yearbook 1957* (N.Y.: H.W. Wilson Co., 1957), 19-21, *Notable American Women, The Modern Period: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Pr., 1980), 32-33, *DAB* suppl. 8 (1988), 12-14, and *Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia 1* (Waterford, Conn.: Yorlin Publics., 1999), 442-446; Alfred A. Lewis and Constance Woodworth, *Miss Elizabeth Arden* (N.Y.: Coward, McCann, & Geoghegan, Inc., 1972); Alfred A. Lewis, *Ladies and Not-So-Gentle Women* (N.Y.: Viking, 2000); "Arden Interests Buy Control of Building," *NYT*, Mar. 9, 1944, 28; NY County; "Gifts Only for Men in New Shop," *NYT*, Dec. 5, 1956, 46; Florence N. Graham (Elizabeth Arden) obit., *NYT*, Oct. 19, 1966, 1 and 47; "Elizabeth Arden's Will is Filed," *NYT*, Oct. 28, 1966, 31; "Cosmetics Makers Putting on New Faces," *NYT*, May 19, 1968, III, 16; "Elizabeth Arden, Inc.," *International Directory of Company Histories 40* (N.Y. St. James Pr., 2001), 169-172.
35. Lewis and Woodworth, 88.
36. The spa was created from the combined adjacent farms of Arden and Elisabeth Marbury, the latter's purchased after Marbury's death in 1933.
37. Cited in *DAB* suppl. 8, 12.
38. Oct. 19, 1966, 47.
39. NYC, Dept. of Buildings (Alt. 1323-1929); *REG*, July 13, 1929, 43; *Mott B. Schmidt: an Architectural Portrait* (N.Y. Natl. Acad. of Design, 1980). Schmidt had designed houses on Sutton Place for Elisabeth Marbury and Elsie deWolfe, Anne Vanderbilt, and Anne Morgan (1921).
40. "Salon for Beauty," *NYT*, Jan. 26, 1930, XI, 2.
41. Federal Writers' Project, 221.

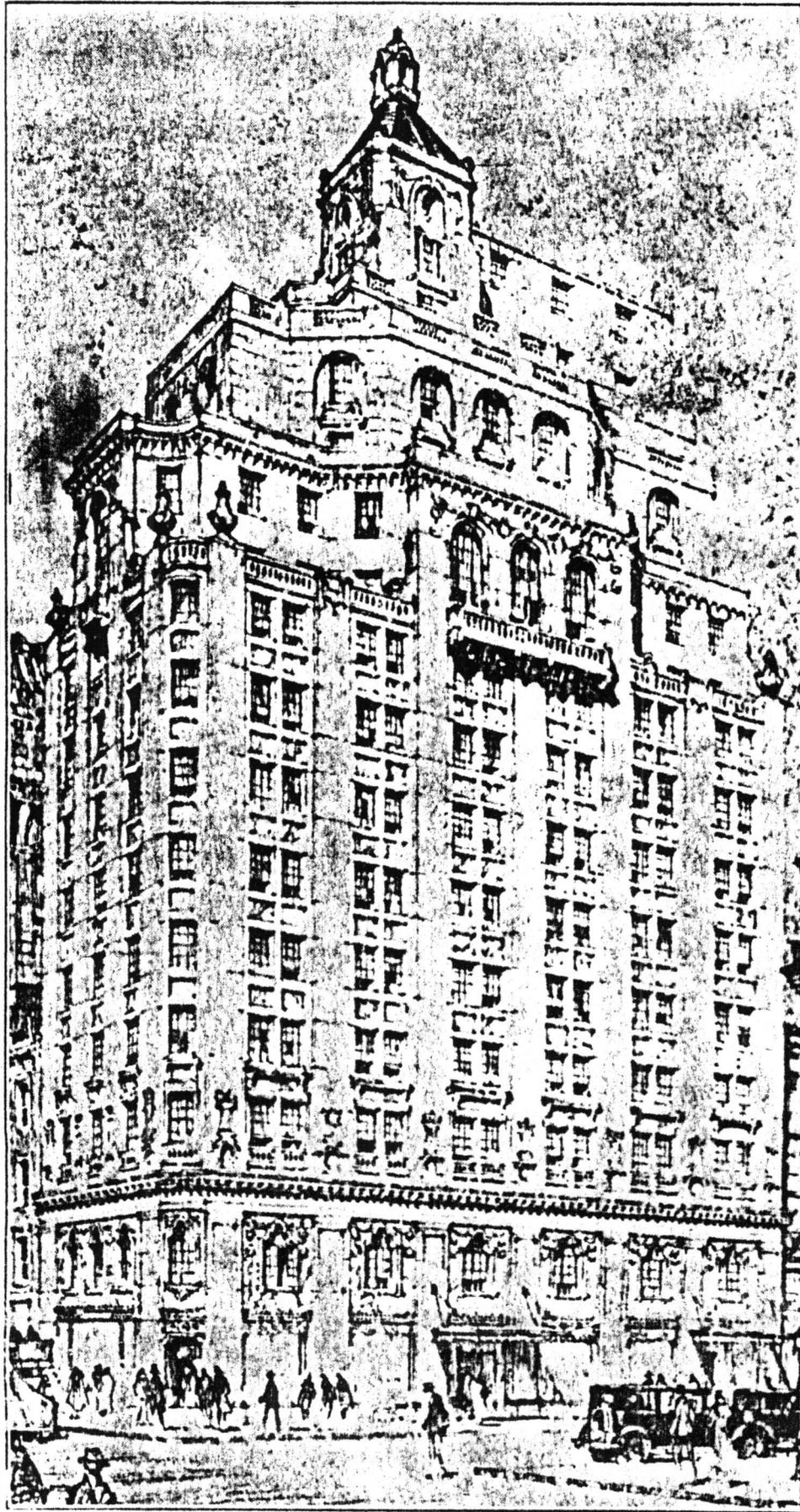
42. Cited in *Current Biography Yearbook*, 19.
43. Cited in *Women in World History*, 444.
44. NY County; *Manhattan Address Directories* (1929-93); NYC, Dept. of Buildings (Alt. 3636-1938); "Shoe Firm Leases Fifth Ave. Space," *NYT*, Dec. 13, 1938, 47; "Business Notes [I. Miller]," *NYT*, June 6, 1939, 34; Lewis Mumford, "The Sky Line: New Faces on the Avenue," *New Yorker*, Sept. 9, 1939, 63-64; Talbot F. Hamlin, "Some Restaurants and Recent Shops," *Pencil Points* (Aug. 1939), 496-497; "I. Miller & Sons, Inc. New York City," *Architectural Forum* (Dec. 1939), 438-439; LPC, *I. Miller Building Designation Report* (LP-2033)(N.Y.: City of New York, 1999), prepared by Gale Harris; "Broadcasters Lease New 5th Ave. Studios," *NYT*, Mar. 6, 1939, 29; "Business Leases [Institute of Pacific Relations]," *NYT*, Nov. 17, 1943, 40; "Work of Pacific Group," *NYT*, May 3, 1953, E8; "Polio Chapter in New Home," *NYT*, June 12, 1948, 18; "News of Realty [National Foundation]," *NYT*, May 13, 1966, 84; "March of Dimes," www.modimes.org website; "Leases...[Fund for the Republic]," *NYT*, July 16, 1953, 37; "Three Elected Directors of Fund for the Republic," *NYT*, Dec. 20, 1954, 23; "Fund for the Republic Archives," www.libweb.princeton.edu website; "Space is Leased [Olmsted Sound Studios]," *NYT*, July 23, 1954, 27; "News of Realty [Saudek Assocs.]," *NYT*, Dec. 14, 1966, 65; "Saudek's *Omnibus*: Ambitious Forerunner of Public TV," www.current.org website; *Manhattan Office Buildings: Midtown* (1984 and 1985); Horsley; "A Million Will Buy a New Shop, Dr. Gucci Learns," *NYT*, Oct. 10, 1970, 35; "New Gucci Out-Gucci's Itself," *NYT*, June 6, 1980, B4.
45. The I. Miller Building (redesigned 1926, Louis H. Friedland) is a designated New York City Landmark.

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 Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building) has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

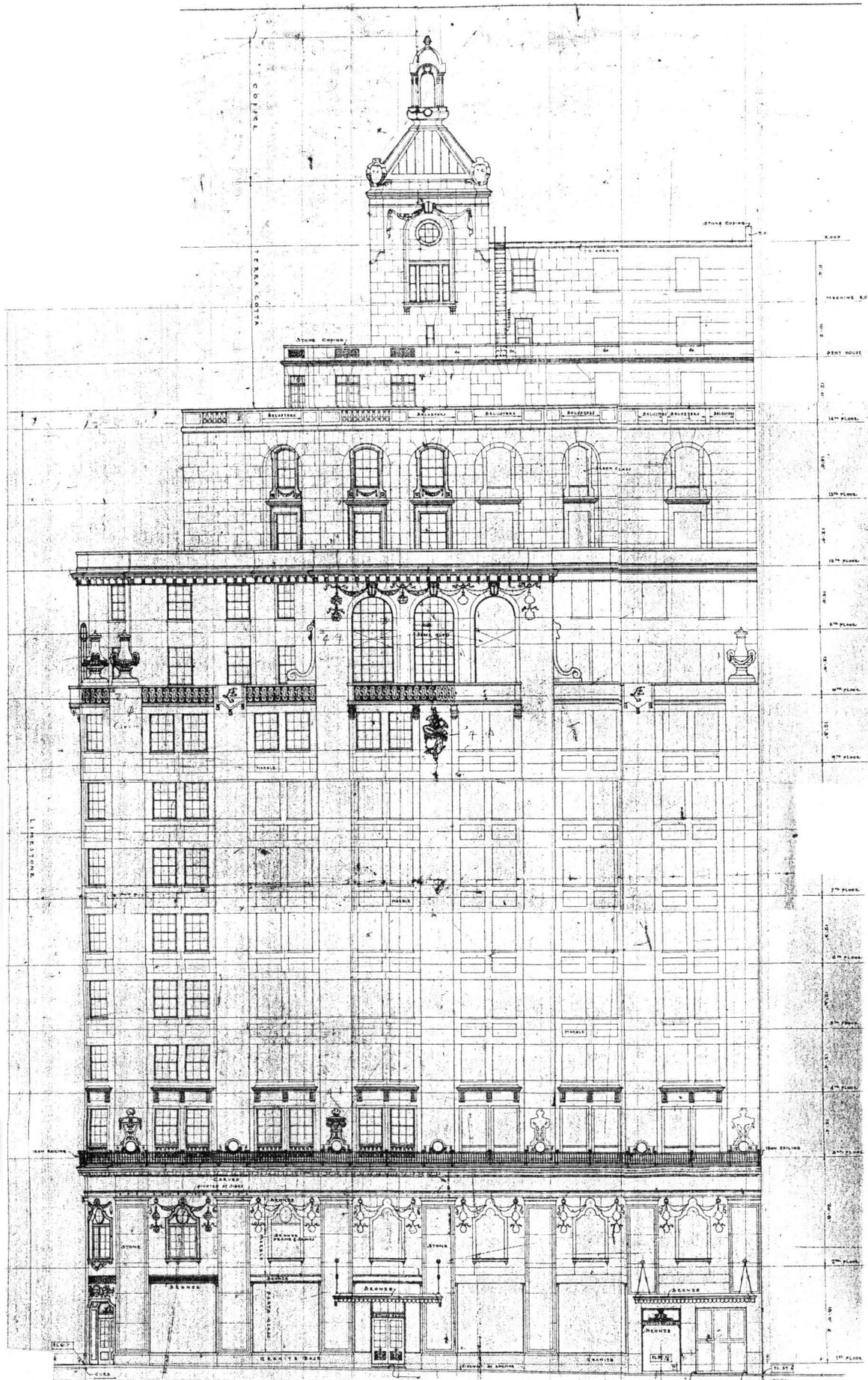
The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Aeolian Building was constructed in 1925-27 to the design of architects Warren & Wetmore, a firm best known for its designs for hotels and railroad-related buildings (notably Grand Central Terminal), for the Gould Realty Co., controlled by Commodore Charles A. Gould, a wealthy iron and steel manufacturer and property owner (who died in 1926); that the building was awarded a gold medal by the Fifth Avenue Association prior to its completion, and was sold at public auction in 1927 and acquired as an investment by Gould's daughter, Celia Gould Milne, who retained it until 1944; that the building was leased until 1938 as the headquarters of the Aeolian Co., a leading manufacturer of roll-operated instruments; that, designed in a restrained and graceful neo-Classical style with French Renaissance style detailing, the Aeolian Building is clad in Indiana limestone with Italian marble spandrel panels, and buff-colored terra cotta on the upper portion; that, following the requirements of the 1916 Zoning Resolution, the building rises nine stories before setting back on the tenth, twelfth, and fourteenth stories, and features a rounded corner on the lower nine stories, upper portions with angles and concave curves, ornamental bronze and carved garlands and other decorative elements, large urns surmounting the ninth story, and a tower with a pyramidal roof (covered in copper) with a lantern rising in front of a two-story penthouse/mechanical section; that the building was called by Paul Goldberger in the *New York Times* in 1984 "a lyrical... gem... that may be the city's most inventive merging of modern commercial design with French and classical architectural detail... as good a reminder as New York has that architecture can be exuberant and fanciful yet discreet and well-mannered"; and that since 1930 this has been the location of the flagship Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon, the creation of Florence Nightingale Graham (1878-1966), who took the professional name of Elizabeth Arden in 1910 when she opened a Fifth Avenue salon and was one of the pioneers of the women's cosmetics and beauty business and became one of the most successful American businesswomen of all time, and that Elizabeth Arden, Inc., owned this building from 1944 to 1969.

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 Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), 689-691 Fifth Avenue (aka 1 East 54th Street), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1290, Lot 1, as its Landmark Site.



Preliminary Rendering of the Aeolian Building

Source: *Real Estate Record & Guide* (Dec. 18, 1926)



Aeolian Building, south elevation blueprint (c. 1925)
Courtesy of Vornado Realty Trust



Aeolian Building

Source: *Pencil Points, in Drafting Room Practice*, Eugene Clute (1928)



Aeolian Building (c. 1927)

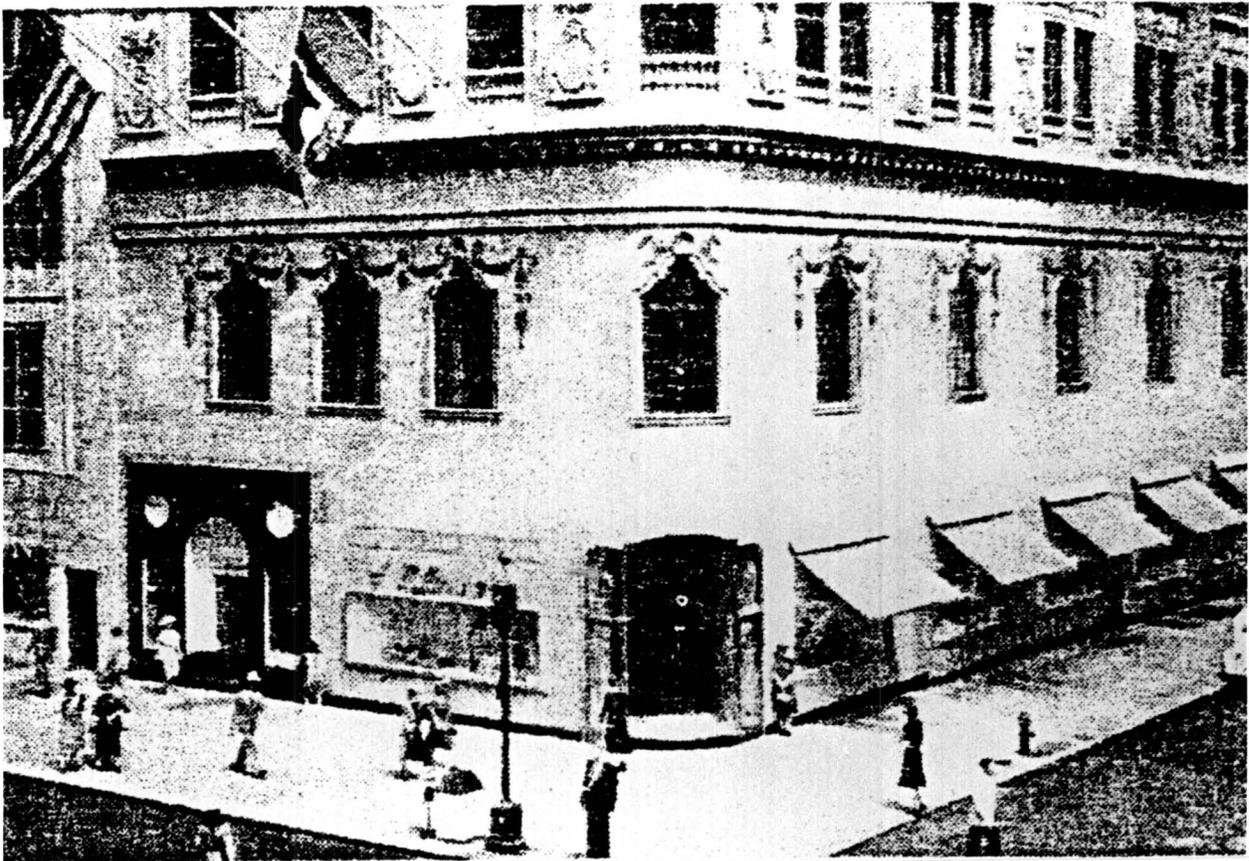
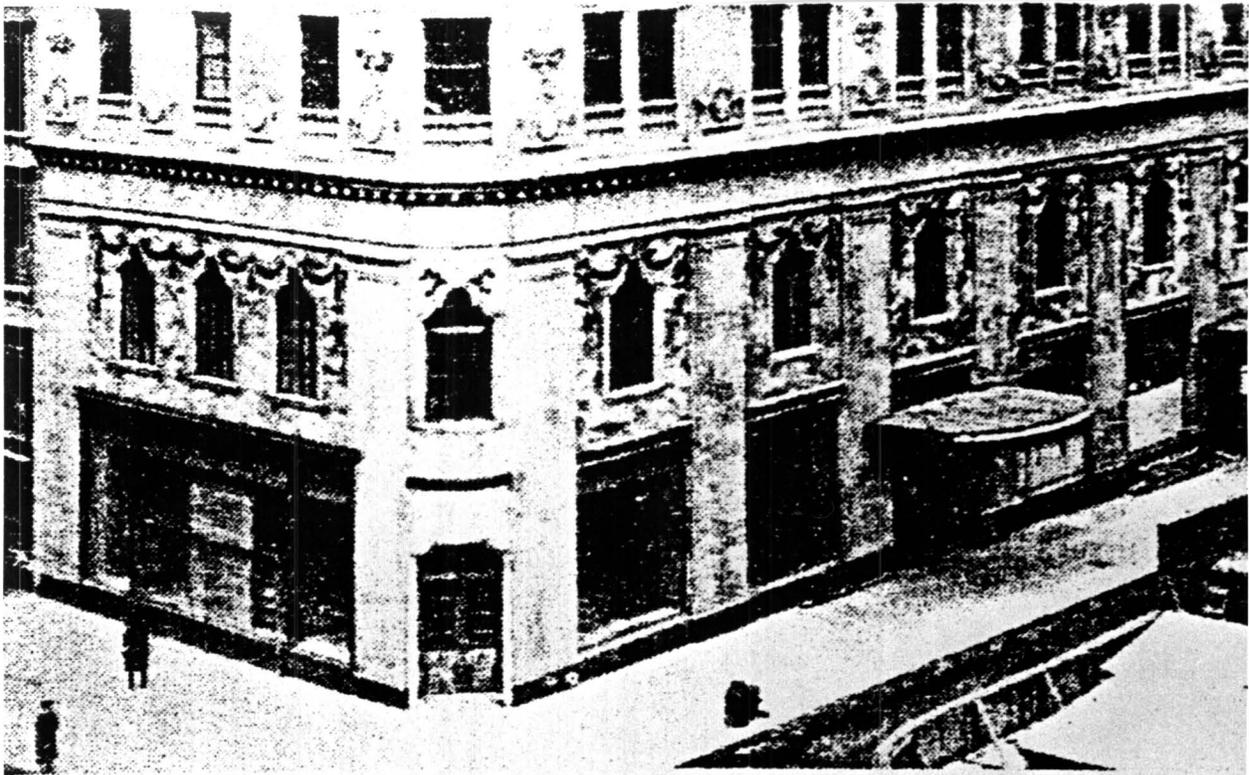
Source: New York Public Library



(right) Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon (1929, Mott B. Schmidt) c. 1931
Source: Fay S. Lincoln, Historical Collection and Labor Archives, Pennsylvania State University,
in *On Fifth Avenue: Then and Now*, Ronda Wist (1992)



Elizabeth Arden (Florence Nightingale Graham) (1878-1966) in 1947
Source: *Miss Elizabeth Arden*, Lewis and Woodworth (1972)



(upper) Original base of the Aeolian Building

(lower) Base as remodeled by Robert Carson for I. Miller & Sons (1938); Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon (1929) at left

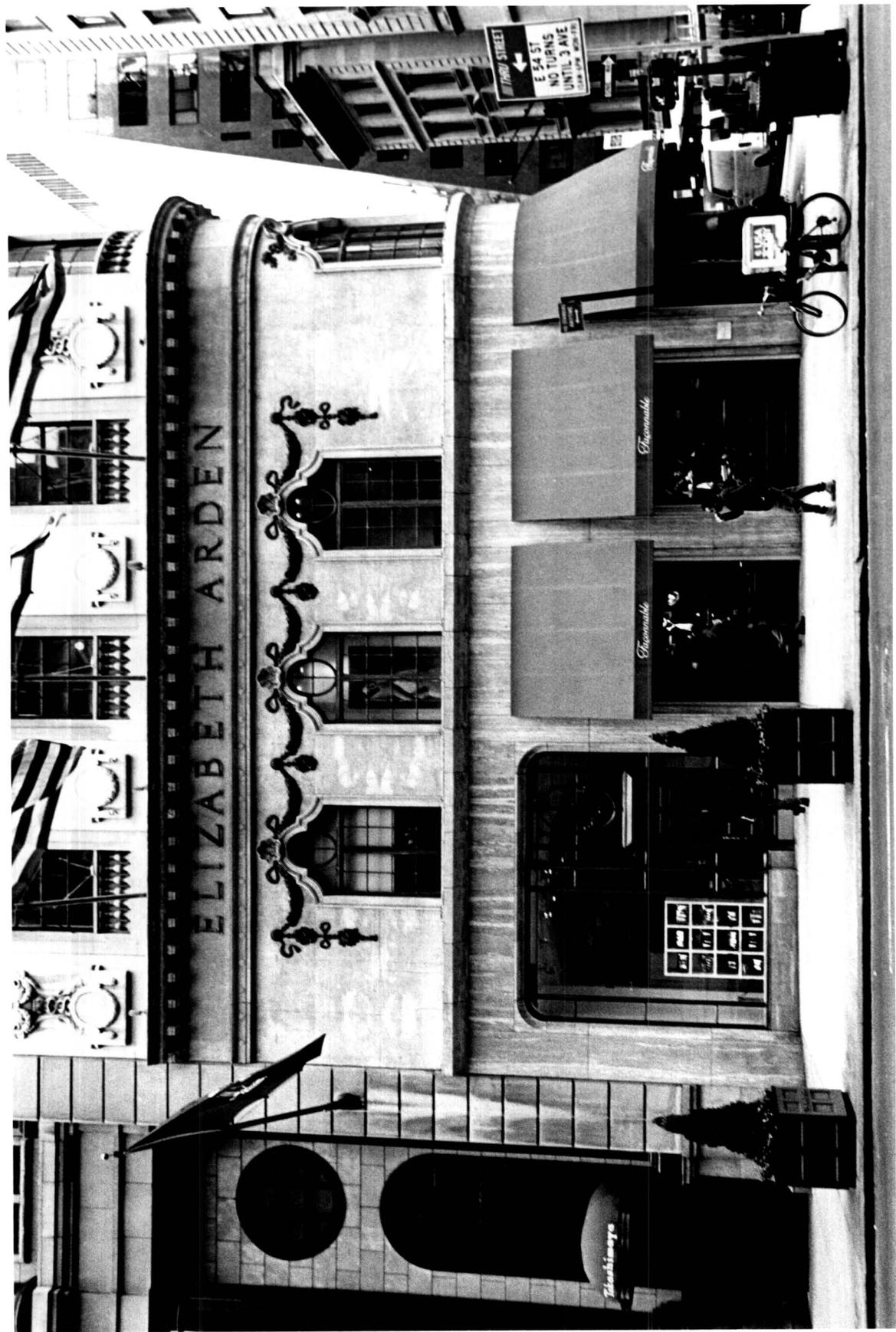
Source: *Pencil Points* (August 1939)



Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), Fifth Avenue facade
Photo: Carl Forster



Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building)
Photo: Carl Forster



Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), base of Fifth Avenue facade
Photo: Carl Forster



Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), base of East 54th Street facade
Photo: Carl Forster



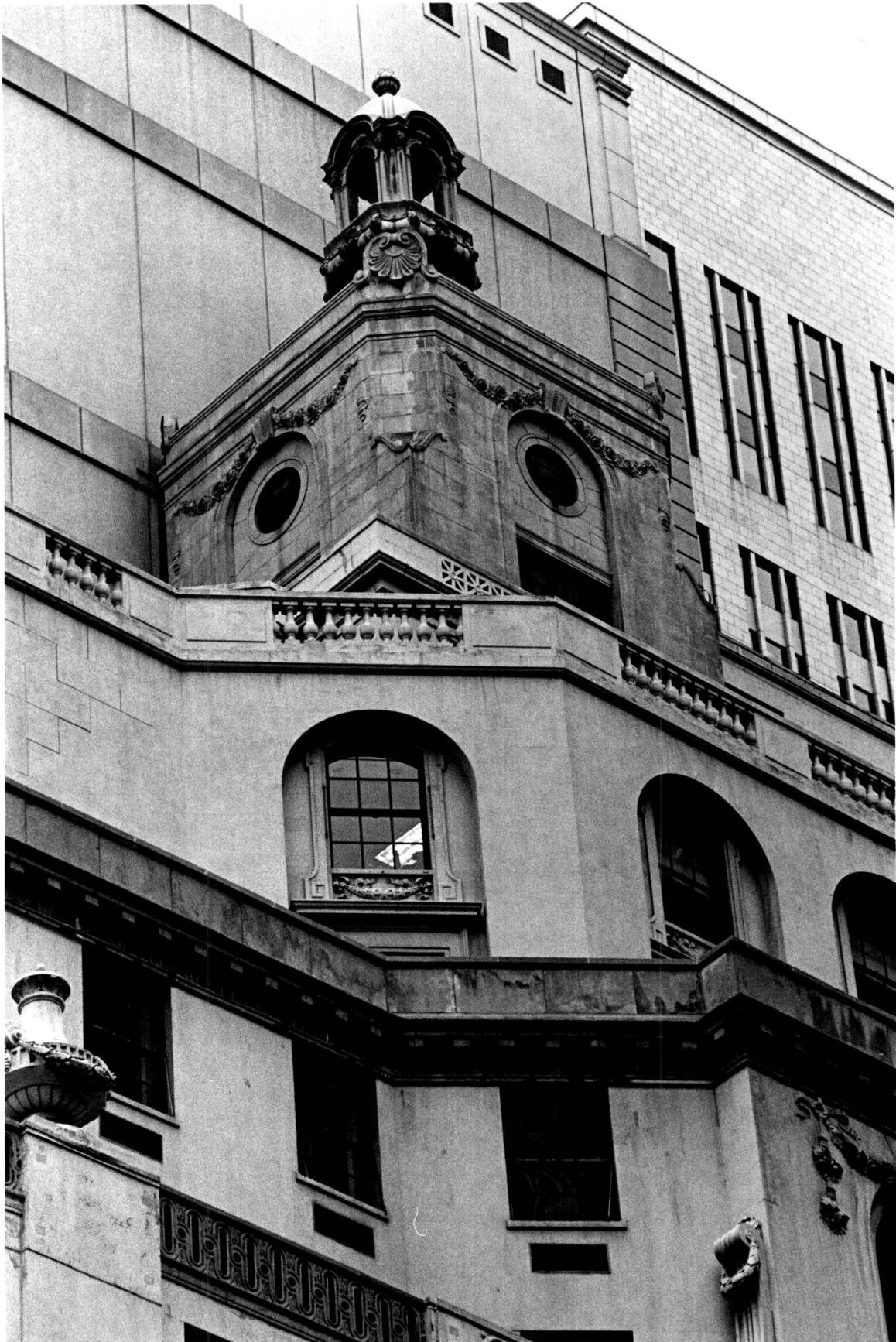
Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), detail of Fifth Avenue facade
Photo: Carl Forster



Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), upper portion
Photo: Carl Forster



Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), detail of East 54th Street facade
Photo: Carl Forster

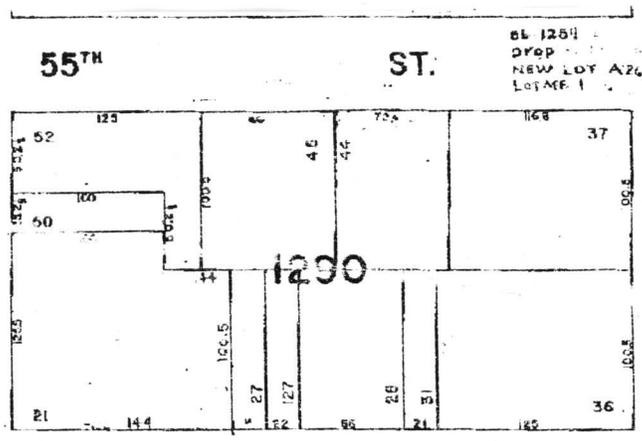
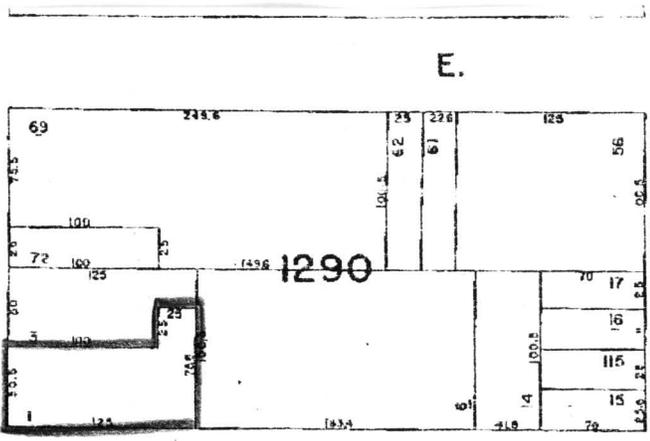


Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), upper portion
Photo: Carl Forster



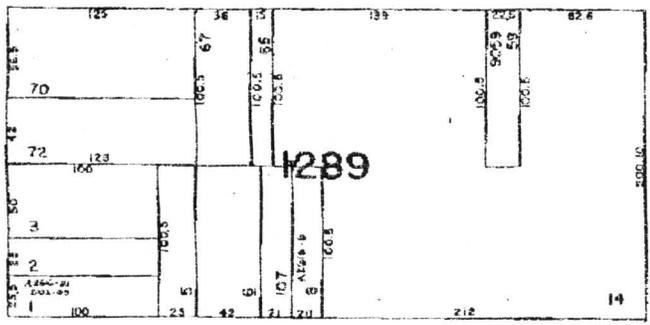
Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building), tower
Photo: Carl Forster

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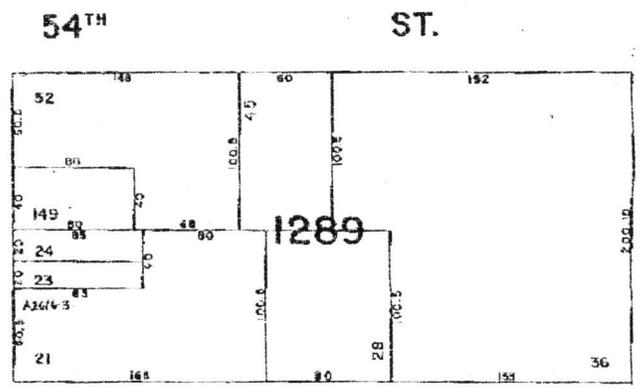
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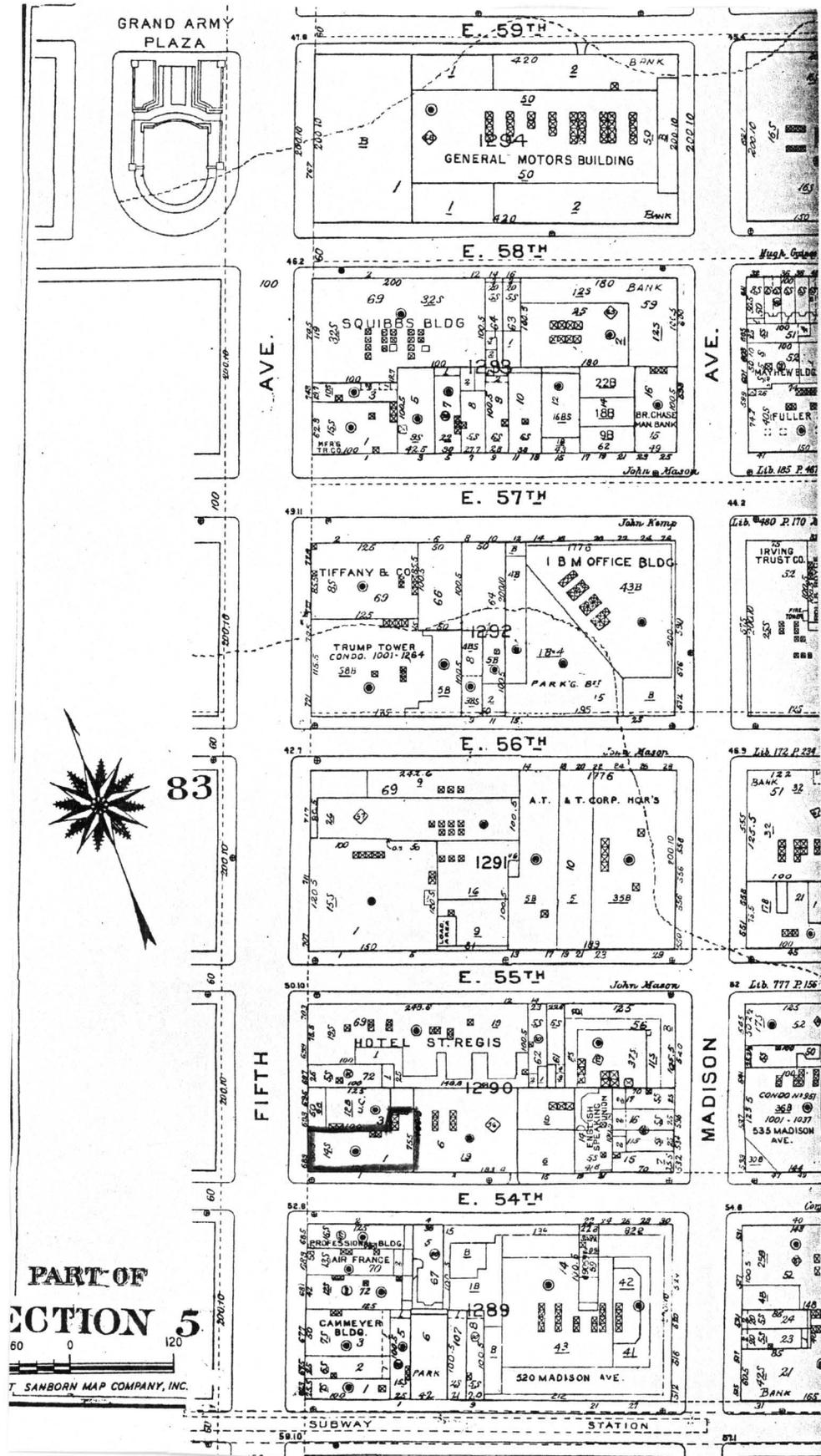
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Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building)
 Landmark Site: Manhattan Tax Map Block 1290, Lot 1
 Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map



Aeolian Building (later Elizabeth Arden Building)
 Source: Sanborn, *Manhattan Land Book* (2000-2001), pl. 84