Landmarks Preservation Commission
August 29, 1989; Designation List 220
LP-1649

287 BROADWAY BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1871-72; architect John B. Snook.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 149, Lot 29.

On January 19, 1988, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 287 Broadway Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing was continued to April 19, 1988 (Item No. 1). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of eleven witnesses spoke in favor of designation. At the public hearings, a representative of the owner indicated that no position had been taken in regard to the proposed designation but subsequently submitted a letter opposing designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

Prominently situated on a corner site, the 287 Broadway Building is notable for its combination of the Italianate and French Second Empire styles as executed in cast iron, and one of the few surviving examples in New York City. Erected in 1871-72 for the estate of Stephen Storm, a prominent wholesale grocer and tobacco merchant, this bank and office building was designed by John B. Snook, one of the most prominent New York architects of the time. The prestige of the building was indicated both by the mansard roof and an early Otis passenger elevator. The cast-iron facades on both Broadway and Reade Street feature large round-arched windows separated by Ionic columns at the second story and by Corinthian above, each story crowned by a cornice. The high mansard roof, topped by lacy iron cresting, retains its original slate shingles and is pierced by dormers with segmental pediments and round-arched windows. This building graphically illustrates the transformation of lower Broadway in the 19th century from a residential boulevard into the city's commercial center

The Commercial Transformation of Lower Broadway[1]

The unparalleled growth of New York City in the 19th century, which led to its emergence as the largest and richest city in the country, was primarily the result of commerce. Following the War of 1812 and the reopening of the Atlantic trade routes, and the completion in 1825 of the Erie Canal, which connected New York to the interior, the city grew into the country's major port and trading center. Commercial pressures almost immediately began to push the city northward beyond the geographical limits of lower Manhattan, and a pattern of rapid development and redevelopment emerged. The city's commercial districts moved into former residential areas, replacing older houses with first-class shops, while new residential districts for the wealthy developed still further north on

the city's outskirts. Older prime commercial areas to the south became warehouse and wholesale districts.

Following the completion in 1846 of the precedent-setting A.T. Stewart drygoods store (280 Broadway),designed by Joseph Trench and John B. Snook,[2] the section of Broadway north of City Hall rapidly changed into the city's leading commercial district. In the following decades, Broadway between City Hall Park and Madison Square became the major commercial artery of the metropolis. Stewart's store, an impressive stone Italianate-style "palazzo" with cast-iron and glass storefronts, also established the architectural character for much of that development for the rest of the century.

The site of the 287 Broadway Building contained a dwelling and carriage house as early as 1794, owned by attorney William Alexander. By the time Elbert Anderson bought the house in 1816, the southern end of the block already contained stores; Anderson demolished the house in 1818 and the following year erected a commercial building. Stephen Storm purchased the property as an investment in 1821.

Storm, a sixth generation descendant of Dutch settlers, was alternately a wholesale grocer and tobacco merchant. In the 1840s the buildings on the west side of Broadway near Chambers Street were replaced by two fifty-foot wide buildings. Stephen Storm and the other three owners of property on the west side of Broadway retained the titles to the land and buildings and combined them in 1848-49 to form the Irving House Hotel. Famous guests included Swedish singer Jenny Lind in 1850 and Hungarian patriot Louis Kossuth in 1851.

In response to New York City's expanding economy in the years following the Civil War, the Storm family again changed the use of its property at 287 Broadway in 1871 when it commissioned John B. Snook to design a cast-iron building for banking rooms and offices. These uses, as well as other commercial uses, continued through the rest of the century. This building, and the changing uses of its site, graphically illustrate the transformation of lower Broadway in the 19th century from a residential boulevard to the City's commercial center.

The Architect[3]

John B. Snook (1815-1901) (also listed in various sources as Jonathan Butler Snook) was born in London, and came to New York as a child of two, where he was educated in private schools. After working in his father's carpentry business, Snook established an architectural partnership with Joseph Trench in the 1840s, which lasted until 1857. Snook's sophisticated architectural library included Stuart & Revett's Antiquities of Athens (1762) and P.E. Robinson's Vitruvius Britannicus (1835). The firm of Trench & Snook is credited with the design of the first A.T. Stewart Store (1845-46) across the street from 287 Broadway at the corner of Broadway and Chambers Street (now the Sun Building, a designated New York City Landmark). Dubbed the white marble palace, it was the first Italianate structure in New York City. Other clients of Snook's prolific

practice included members of New York's most prominent families, among them the Vanderbilts, for whom he designed the original Grand Central Station (1869-71), and the William K. Vanderbilt Residences (1879-82).

In 1887 Snook took his three sons and a son-in-law (John W. Boyleston) into his office, renaming it John B. Snook & Sons to celebrate the fiftieth anniversery of the firm's founding, and established an office in Brooklyn. The firm continued well into the next century.

Snook's impressive career, spanning the second half of the nineteenth century, included some 500 buildings. He embraced such stylistic modes as the Classical Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Neo-Grec, Queen Anne, and Romanesque, a tribute to his versatility. Much of his work in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was executed in cast iron, including 83 Mercer Street (1872), and 65-66 Greene Street (1872-73) in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District.

The Italianate and Second Empire styles and Cast-Iron Buildings[4]

The 287 Broadway Building is notable for its combination of the Italianate and French Second Empire styles as executed in cast iron. The Italianate style in its north Italian variety, characterized by flat roofs, arched windows and a minimum of unbroken wall surfaces, appeared in the United States in 1850 when R.G. Hatfield designed the Sun Building in Baltimore. Hatfield's building, in the style of St. Mark's Library, Venice (1536), designed by Italian Renaissance architect Jacopo Sansovino, employs the motif of the Roman Colosseum--arched openings framed between columns with a full entablature at each story--in ornate form. Constructed facing Franklin Square (now occupied by footings of the Brooklyn Bridge), the Harper Brothers Building (1854, demolished) was an early building in this style in New York. 287 Broadway illustrates the pattern established by Hatfield's building in a slightly less ornate manner. The Italianate style as executed in cast iron was particularly effective in creating large window openings to allow light into the interiors of buildings.

The hallmark of the Second Empire style is a high mansard roof with coping at the edges of the visible slopes, combined with dormer windows. The first great public monument in the Second Empire style, the extension of the Palace of the Louvre (1852-1857) in Paris,[5] was a more sculptural version of the 17th-century parts of the palace. James Renwick was the architect of two early buildings in this style in America, the Corcoran Gallery, Washington D.C. (1859), and the Main Hall, Vassar College (1860). By the 1870s major buildings in this style were springing up in many American cities, including New York. The mansard roof was a sign of prestige associated with the rise of new commercial architecture in New York, concurrent with the growth of the insurance and banking industries in the 1860s. The Equitable Life Assurance Society Building (Arthur Gilman and Edward H. Kendall with George B. Post, 1868-70) was for a time the tallest building in New York, and an impressive symbol of this growth. That building's passenger elevator and mansard roof were emulated by architects in prestigious buildings of similar use, such as 287 Broadway.

The architectural treatment of cast-iron facades went through several distinct phases before the material finally fell from favor towards the end of the century.[6] Early in its 19th-century commercial use cast iron was adopted by the architectural profession and began to reflect the Italianate style prevalent among commercial buildings in the 1850s. A series of cast-iron "palazzi" were produced, often painted white to imitate marble. In New York these included the Cary Building (King & Kellum, 1856-57) at 105-107 Chambers Street, and the Haughwout Store (John Gaynor, 1856) at 488 Broadway, both designated New York City Landmarks. These buildings, as well as the majority of Italianate cast-iron buildings in New York, were used for mercantile purposes.

In the late 1860s and early 1870s, cast-iron buildings began to be executed in the recently imported French Second Empire Style, with its most obvious feature the mansard roof. In addition to mercantile buildings, like the Lord & Taylor store (James H. Giles, 1869) at 901 Broadway, a designated New York City Landmark, it also appeared in other prestigious buildings like hotels (the Gilsey House, 1200 Broadway, Stephen Decatur Hatch, 1869-71, a designated New York City Landmark), insurance company buildings (New York Life, 346 Broadway, 1870, Griffith Thomas, demolished), and office buildings such as 287 Broadway.

The New Building application for 287 Broadway was filed in March of 1871, with John B. Snook as architect and the Estate of Stephen Storm as owner. Construction began two months later. Snook's design as filed was for an Italianate four-story building with a basement, with two cast-iron facades and brick side walls terminating in a flat tin roof. The ironwork was by Jackson Burnett & Co. The application stated that the building was to be used for banking rooms and offices.[7] Shortly after, an amendment to the application changed the roof to mansard and added an Otis elevator; both features enhanced the prestige of the building for its intended use.[8]

The plans for the building indicate an areaway on Broadway and Reade Street, with steps down from the street level to a side entrance, as well as steps to the main entrance on Broadway.[9] To the north of the stoop on the basement level (now the first story), the Broadway facade featured paired doors with single transoms capped by flattened arches. These arches continue on the Reade Street facade. Early tenants included the Union and Pacific Railroad Company (later the Union Pacific Railroad), and office supply concerns.

Jackson, Burnet & Co.[10]

Jackson, Burnet & Co., manufacturer of the ironwork for 287 Broadway, began as the G.R. Jackson Company, listed in 1840 as manufacturers of iron fasteners with a factory at 201 Centre Street. The firm later changed its name to George R. Jackson, Burnet & Co. and opened a factory at 337 East 13th Street and Avenue C, manufacturing "iron buildings, wrought and cast-iron railings...roofs, and iron stairs." By the early 1870s the firm became the Excelsior Iron Works under the management of Jackson, Burnet & Co. It maintained the original factory at 201 Centre Street as a branch

office. By the 1880s the firm name was changed to the Atlantic Iron Works under the management of Burnet & Co. Examples of iron-fronted buildings by the Atlantic Iron Works include 268 Canal Street (1886, Lansing C. Holden) and 485 Broome Street (1872, Elisha Sniffen) in the Soho-Cast Iron Historic District. By 1890 the firm was no longer in business.

Description

This six-story Italianate/Second Empire building, located on the southwest corner of Broadway and Reade Streets, extends twenty-five and 1/2 feet along Broadway and ninety-six feet along Reade Street. Faced in cast iron, the building is crowned by a mansard roof with slate shingles, pierced by dormer windows and surmounted by iron cresting. The windows above the first story are the original one-over-one wood sash.

The first story has been faced with corrugated metal on the Broadway facade, covering the original flat-arched openings. On the Reade Street facade, these openings have been almost entirely covered by a thin brick and plywood veneer, leaving little original detail visible. Above the first story, the exterior of 287 Broadway looks much as it did in 1872. On the Broadway facade, stories two through six are each composed of one bay containing three window openings. The south opening of the second story (formerly the entrance) contains a projecting portico and entablature with Ionic columns with fluted bases. The opening, slightly narrower than the others, contains one single-pane window below an arched opening (now sealed) separated by a transom bar. The other two openings contain one-over-one wood sash. All the window openings are arched and capped by scrolled keystones and flanked by engaged Ionic columns. A projecting pilaster marks the north corner. Stories three through five each contain three window openings like those seen below, flanked by engaged Corinthian columns and terminated by piers at each end. Several of the capitals are missing. The fifth story is capped by a projecting dentiled and modillioned cornice. The sixth story is a mansard roof with hexagonal slate shingles and metal coping pierced by two dormer windows crowned by segmental-arched pediments supported by pilasters flanked by volutes. The dormers are of wood sheathed in metal. The composition is crowned by lacy iron cresting.

The Reade Street facade is similar to that on Broadway. It has three bays each containing four window openings, each bay separated by projecting piers. The two center window openings are covered with a decorative wrought-iron fire escape stretching from the second story to the roof. One original pilaster survives on the first story at the west end of this facade.

The south wall, visible above neighboring buildings on Broadway, is covered in stucco and contains four window openings with two-over-two sash and stone sills. The rear wall, visible above the fifth story, is also covered in stucco.

Subsequent History

Above the first story 287 Broadway survives remarkably intact. The stone stoop was removed in 1912. At that time the basement level was designated the first story and the building classified as a six-story building. In 1912 four windows on the sixth story were enlarged, and in 1915 cast-iron projections beyond the building line, such as railings and posts on the sidewalk of the Reade Street elevation, were removed. The building remained in the Storm family until 1940, and continues to house commercial establishments. In recent years several of the upper stories have been used residentially.

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NOTES

1. This account is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, no. 361 Broadway Building Designation Report, report prepared by Anthony Robins (New York, 1982); [Ellen Kramer], "287 Broadway--The History of the Building, its Site and its Neighborhood," (typescript in the research files of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, (c. 1970), 1; a general account of this pattern of development may be found in Charles Lockwood, Manhattan Moves Uptown (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976)

2. Harry E. Resseguie, "A.T. Stewart's Marble Palace--The Cradle of the Department Store," in the New-York Historical Society Quarterly, 43 (1964), 133-35, including notes 3 and 4.

3. Snook's biography is based on "Snook, John Butler," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, ed. Adolf K. Placzek, vol. 4 (New York, 1982), 95; Mary Ann Clegg Smith, "The Commercial Architecture of John Butler Snook," Ph.D dissertation (Pennsylvania State University, 1974), x, xii, 7, and the John Butler Snook obituary, Architects and Builders Magazine, December 1901, p.113.

4. This description of the Italianate and Second Empire styles and cast-iron buildings is based on Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780 (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 79, 103.

5. The name of the style is derived from the French Second Empire, the reign of Napoleon III (1852-1870). See Whiffen, 103.

6. Based on Robins, 3, 4.

7. Although designed to house a bank, available records do not indicate that a bank was ever housed in the 287 Broadway Building.

8. See NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 149, Lot 29. NB 395 - 1871.

9. Smith, 141. In addition, the plans illustrate a large office in the basement with a back room and stairs leading up to the director's room of the bank on the first floor. A lobby in the front of the building leads to a banking room containing a built-in safe. These interior spaces and features do not survive as shown on the plans except for the stairs leading to the upper floors.

10. This account is based on History of Architecture and the Building Trades of Greater New York (New York: Union History Co., 1899), 161 and New York City Directories, 1860-1890. Trow's New York City Directory New York: John F. Trow.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 287 Broadway 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 287 Broadway Building is notable for its combination of the Italianate and French Second Empire styles as executed in cast iron, and one of the few surviving examples in New York City; that it is executed in richly detailed cast iron and is crowned by a prominent slate mansard roof with iron cresting; that it was designed by the prominent New York architect John B. Snook as a bank and office building; that the prestige of the building was indicated both by the mansard roof and the installation of an early Otis passenger elevator; that the building graphically illustrates the transformation of lower Broadway in the 19th century from a residential boulevard into the city's commercial center; that although many original features on the first story have been covered, the upper stories remain unaltered; and that it continues to be used as commercial, office and now residential space.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 31, 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 287 Broadway Building, 287 Broadway, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 149, Lot 29, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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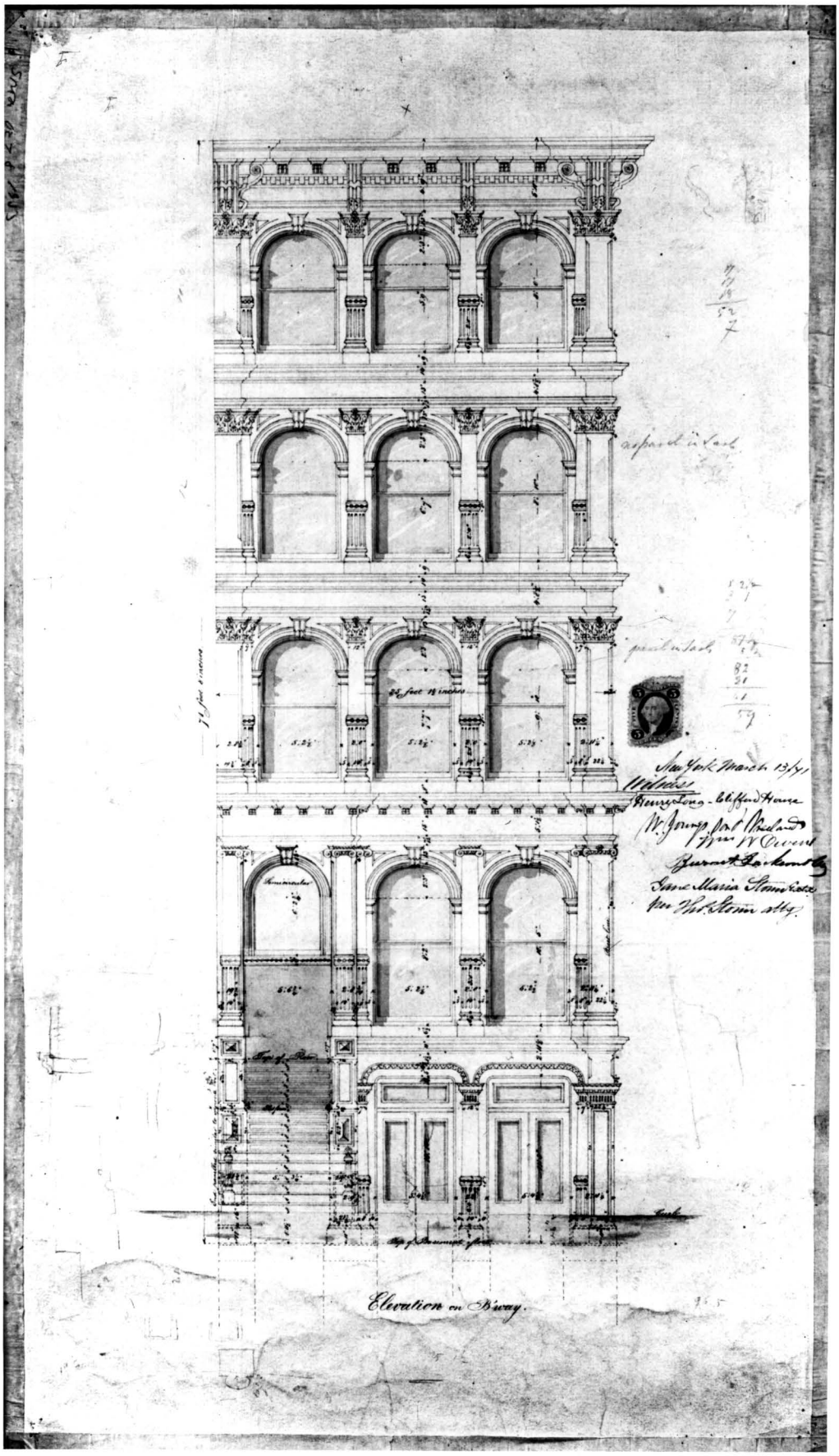


No. 287 Broadway Building, 1871-72
287 Broadway
Photo Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society. New York City

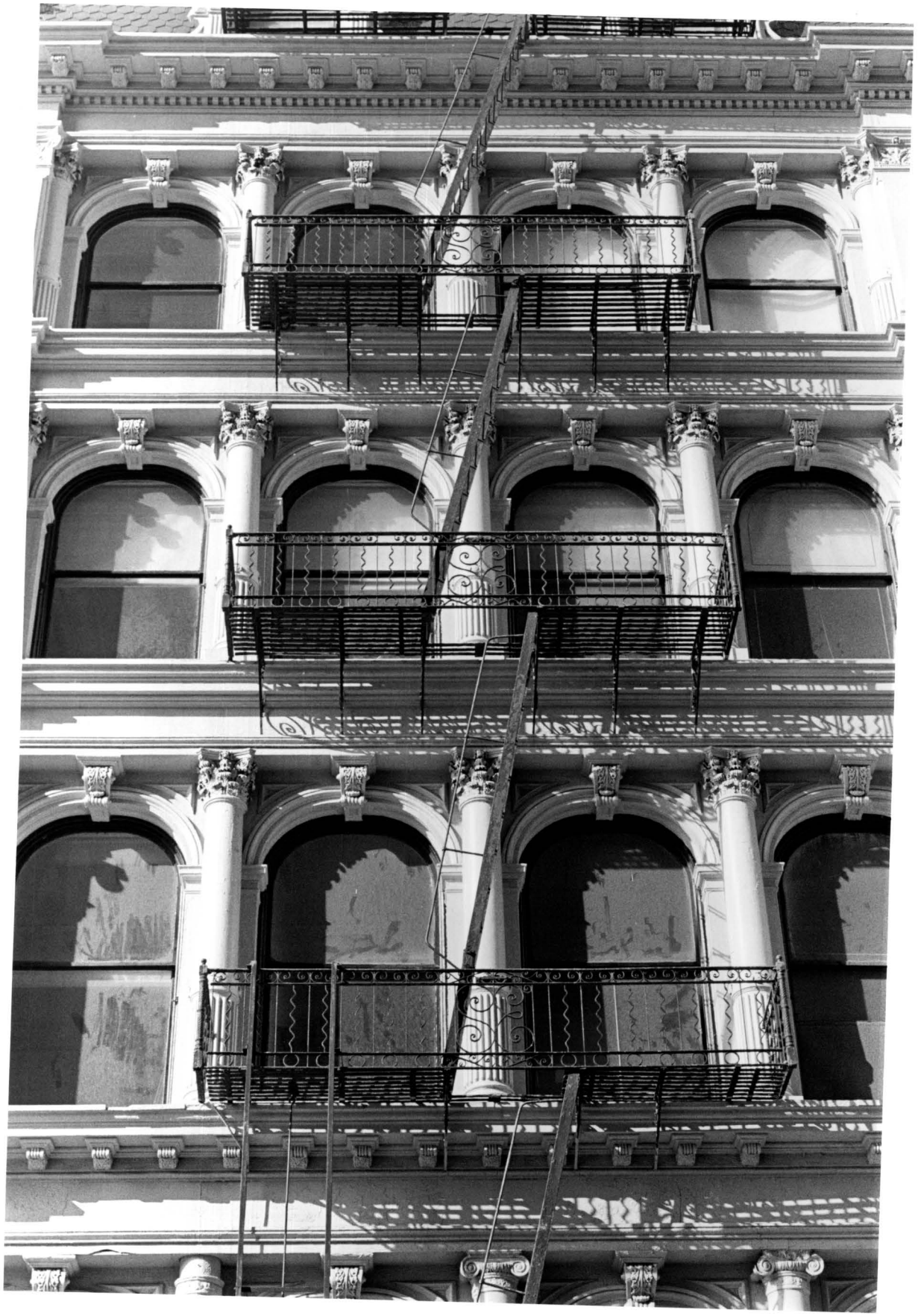
Architect: John B. Snook
Drawing by John B. Snook

No. 287 Broadway Building

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh

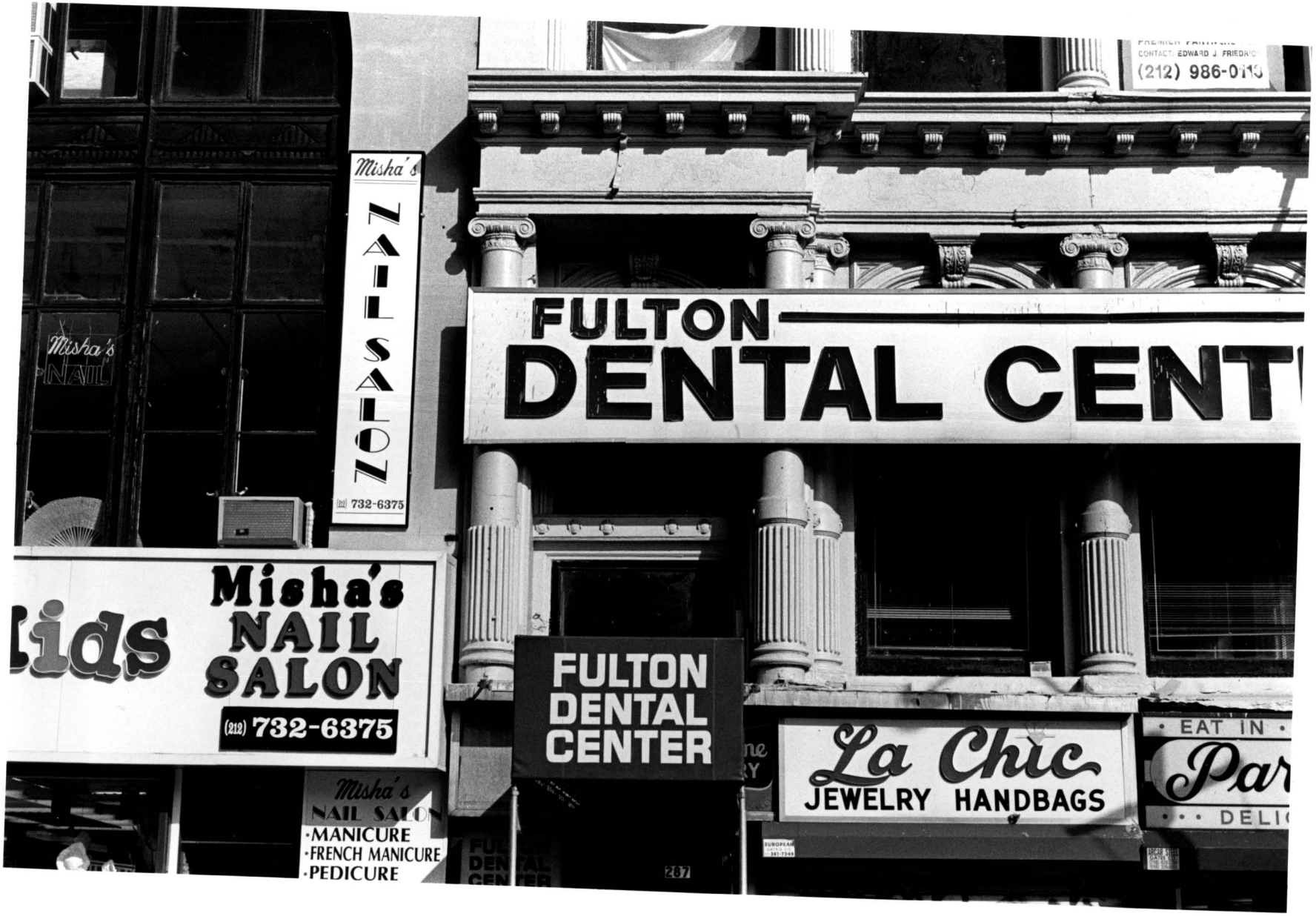
No. 287 Broadway Building
Roof

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh



No. 287 Broadway Building
Fire escape and facade detail, Reade Street facade

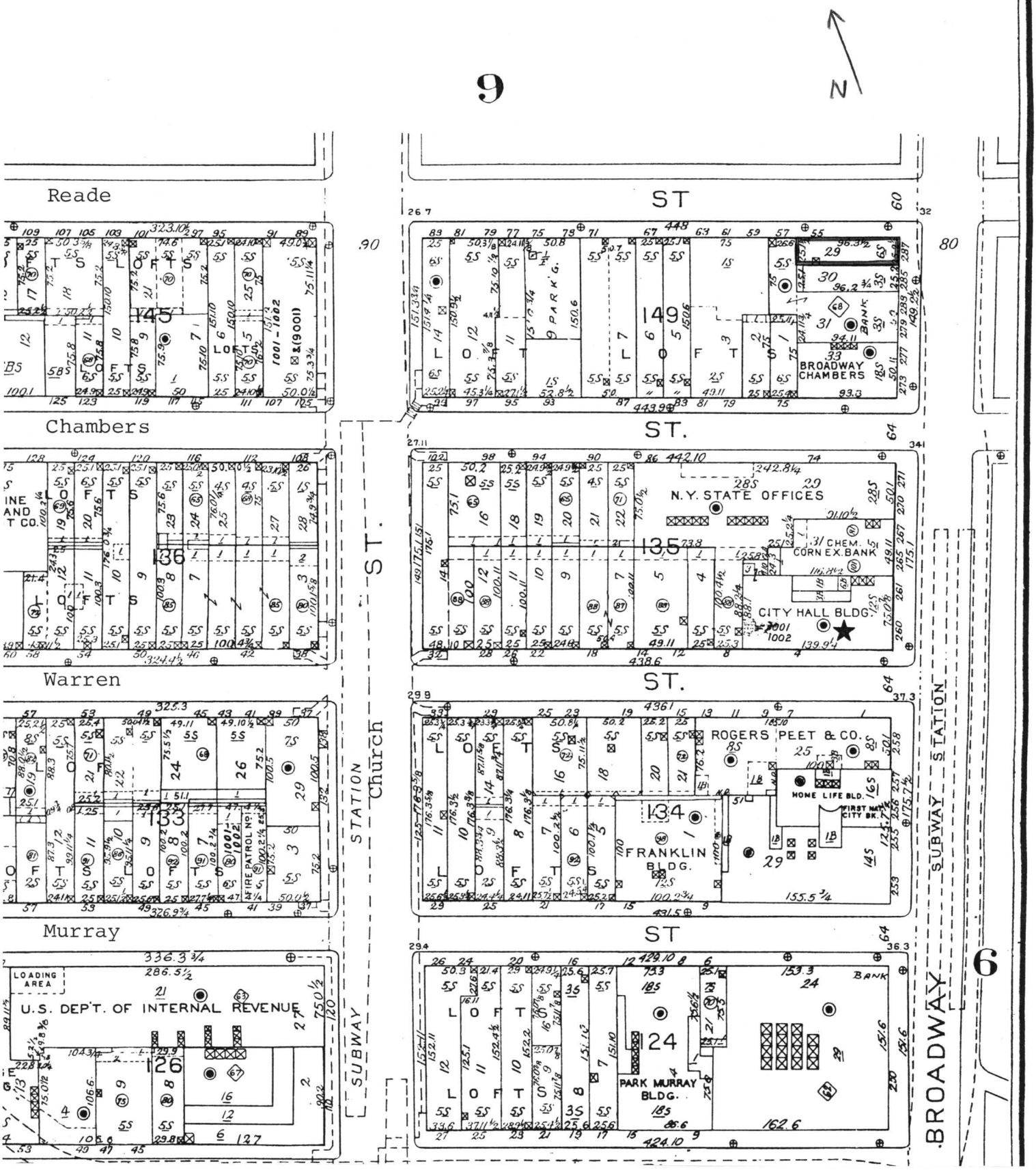
Photo credit: Kevin McHugh



No. 287 Broadway Building
Former entrance, Broadway facade

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh

PLATE 5



No. 287 Broadway Building
287 Broadway
Landmark Site

Graphic Source: Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1988-89