

(Former) **UNITED STATES RUBBER COMPANY BUILDING**, 1790 Broadway (aka 1784-1790 Broadway and 234 West 58th Street), Manhattan. Built 1911-12; architects Carrère & Hastings.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1029, Lot 53.

On October 31, 2000, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the (Former) United States Rubber Company Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were three speakers in favor of designation including a representative of the owner and a representative from the Historic Districts Council. There were no speakers in opposition.

Summary

This elegant, Beaux-Arts style, twenty-story office building was constructed in 1911-12 for the United States Rubber Company at a time when the automobile was beginning to exert a powerful influence on American society. Located on Broadway, along the section known as "Automobile Row," the U.S. Rubber Company Building was one of the most prominent and important of the many automobile-related structures concentrated here. The two lowest floors originally provided retail space for the company's subsidiary, the United States Tire Company, while U. S . Rubber occupied eight of the office stories. Designed by the prominent architectural firm of Carrère & Hastings, this office building features delicately-carved marble facades crowned by a broad copper cornice. The design, which continues around both the Broadway and 58th Street facades, features a distinctive rounded corner and vertically-grouped windows with metal spandrels and thin, continuous piers. In this building, as in their other works, Carrère and Hastings used their training at the French Ecole des Beaux Arts to create an impressive design for a tall building where the skeleton construction is expressed by the thin stone veneer which is obviously non-weight-bearing. The two lowest floors of this building were remodeled in 1959 for a bank.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Automobile Row

At the end of the nineteenth century automobiles, or more precisely horseless carriages, were in the earliest stage of development. At first there were many different types and variations, often growing out of their creator's previous experience in bicycle or carriage manufacture. The new vehicles were looked upon as experimental, purchased only by the very rich and adventurous, since roads, which had been created for horse-drawn vehicles, had uneven, often treacherous surfaces. Between 1886 and 1899 there were approximately 300 individually-built automobiles in the United States.¹ During the first decade of the twentieth century, due to considerable experimentation and advancement of the products including mass-production, discussion in the press, and organization of interested owners and manufacturers,² the automobile industry became a strong presence and an economically viable force in the United States. By 1910, *The New York Times* reported that American automobile manufacturers would produce approximately 200,000 vehicles in that year.³

In New York City the influence of the new automobile culture was seen along "Automobile Row," a section of Broadway which eventually stretched between Times Square and 72nd Street. Before 1905, this part of Broadway was home to horses and harness makers, and was characterized as "thoroughly lifeless."⁴ In 1907, *The New York Times* described the same area as "almost a solid line of motor vehicle signs all the way from Times Square to Sherman Square."⁵ The 1910 book, *Both Sides of Broadway*, shows fourteen different automobile and automobile-related stores located between 46th and 50th Streets.⁶ The proximity of similar businesses in "Automobile Row" made it easier for customers to view and compare the products of different manufactures. These businesses, which consisted of automobile sales showrooms, stores for parts and accessories, and garages for both storage and repair services, were primarily located in small, remodeled, older buildings.

Within the next few years, larger firms started to buy bigger lots and erect new buildings. *The New York Times* reported in 1909 on the plans of the B. F. Goodrich Company to build their own showroom and office structure on Broadway and 57th Street (1780-1782 Broadway, designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw and Waid & Willauer), as well as those of the Peerless and A.T. Demerest Companies to build a block to the south, and the purchase of a building at Broadway and 63rd Street for use as a garage.⁷ The construction of the

tallest building north of Times Square for the United States Rubber Company, on the large plot at Broadway and 58th Street just to the north of the B. F. Goodrich Company Building, was an important part of this trend.⁸

The United States Rubber Company⁹

The company was founded by Charles R. Flint who was a self-described "international merchant, financier and negotiator" and also an original partner in the W.R. Grace Company.¹⁰ In 1878, Flint started dealing in rubber produced in the Amazon River basin. In 1892, Flint convinced nine companies involved in the manufacture of rubber footwear (including Charles Goodyear's company which held the first license for the vulcanization process) to merge, and thereby formed the United States Rubber Company. Over the next few years, the company expanded to control about 70 percent of the rubber footwear business in the country, the principal rubber product at that time. Under the leadership of Samuel P. Colt, who began his tenure as president in 1901, the company expanded into related endeavors. Charles Flint began another company in 1898 called the Rubber Goods Manufacturing Company, makers of tires and other rubber industrial products. U.S. Rubber acquired this business in 1899, bringing together four leading brands of tires. After ten years, all these tires were sold under the name "United States Tires," then becoming "U. S. Royal" in 1917. In the same year, the company adopted the "KEDS" name for its many varieties of rubber footwear. During the early years of the twentieth century, the U. S. Rubber Company expanded into the chemical business, manufacturing certain chemicals used in the production of new rubber products and the reclamation of scrap rubber. In 1910, the company also acquired its first rubber plantation in Sumatra to ensure the availability of raw materials. Further expansion into related textiles was achieved in 1917 with the acquisition of the Winnsboro Mills in South Carolina which made tire cord and rubber textile fabrics. Throughout the twentieth century the company continued to grow and diversify, eventually producing foam rubber, synthetic rubber, and TNT used during World War II, among many other products. During the 1950s the company began to acquire related manufacturers in Europe, while continuing to increase its product range and capacity in this country. In order to unify the corporate identity which was so broadly based, in 1967 all the brands were brought together under the name "UNIROYAL."

The United States Rubber Company was first incorporated in New Jersey and maintained its headquarters in New Brunswick for many years. In 1911, the company leased the land on the corner of 58th Street and Broadway in New York City to build a large, more visible corporate headquarters, and a sales outlet for United States Tires. In their 1913 Annual Report, the company declared that the building was completed in the summer of 1912 and that U.S. Rubber occupied ten floors, as well as the two basements, and that most of the other space had been rented “to good tenants.” The organization remained in this building until 1951 when its main offices were moved to Rockefeller Center.

Carrère & Hastings¹¹

John Merven Carrère (1858-1911)

Thomas Hastings (1860-1929)

The firm of Carrère and Hastings, active during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was the leading American exponent of the design philosophy of the French Ecole des Beaux Arts. John Merven Carrère was born in Rio de Janeiro to American parents of French descent, and educated in Switzerland. He entered the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1877, studying in several prominent ateliers, including that of Leon Ginain, a proponent of the neo-Grec style of architecture. Thomas Hastings, born in New York, spent a short time at Columbia University before entering the Ecole des Beaux Arts and serving an apprenticeship in the atelier of Jules Andre. After earning their diplomas - Carrère in 1882 and Hastings in 1884 - both men joined the staff of McKim, Mead & White in New York. After establishing their own partnership in 1885, their first major client was Florida real estate developer Henry Flagler, a partner in Standard Oil. Carrère & Hastings designed the Ponce de Leon and Alcazar Hotels, and several churches in St. Augustine, as well as the “Whitehall,” Flagler’s estate in Palm Beach, all in the Spanish Renaissance style, using innovative concrete construction. In 1891 the firm of Carrère & Hastings gained prominence for their Renaissance-inspired, second-place-winning design for the competition for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. They were more successful in 1897, winning the competition for the New York Public Library (constructed 1898-1911, a designated New York City Landmark). This design established Carrère & Hastings as one of the country’s leading architectural firms.

In addition to monumental public buildings, the firm of Carrère & Hastings was very active in residential design, and also created the designs for fourteen Carnegie-funded libraries in New York. The approaches and arch of the Manhattan Bridge (1905, a designated New York City Landmark) and Grand Army Plaza (1913, a designated New York City Scenic Landmark) reveal the architects’ interest in city planning. The First Church of Christ, Scientist (1899-1903, a designated New York City Landmark) at 96th Street and Central Park West was designed by the firm and is in the finest tradition of Beaux-Arts classicism. Woolsey and Memorial Halls at Yale University (1906) and the New (Century) Theater (demolished), the Vanderbilt Estate, Long Island, the Frick Mansion (1913-15, a designated New York City Landmark), the Staten Island Borough Hall (1903-06, a designated New York City Landmark), and the Richmond County Courthouse (1913-1919, a designated New York City Landmark) were all designed by the firm.

Carrère and Hastings were both members of the Architectural League of New York and Fellows of the American Institute of Architects. After Carrère’s death in 1911, Hastings continued to work under the firm’s name, designing large office buildings such as the Standard Oil Building (1926, a designated New York City Landmark), the Macmillan Building (1924), and the Cunard Building (1919-21, a designated New York City Landmark).

The United States Rubber Company Building¹²

Most of the work of Carrère and Hastings was in the French Renaissance tradition. Thomas Hastings, the primary designer of the firm, believed that architects needed to be educated in one style that would reflect their own time. Rather than imitate past architecture, he believed they should adapt past styles to contemporary needs. Hastings maintained that even after the turn of the twentieth century, American life was still motivated by the same forces that had brought about the Renaissance. Therefore, Hastings chose to adapt French Renaissance precedents because he felt that only in France was architecture “consistently modern.”¹³

Hastings also had ideas about skyscraper design and the increasing height of contemporary buildings. Architects of the early skyscrapers held extensive debates about an appropriate design vocabulary for this completely new building type. They questioned whether the building should somehow express its vertical nature, or whether it should illustrate the idea

whether the building should somehow express its vertical nature, or whether it should illustrate the idea that it was really just a tall collection of horizontal floors. They also discussed whether there should be any indication of the supporting steel skeleton frame on the exterior, rather than trying to make the building appear as if it were constructed of heavy, solid masonry. As president of the Architectural League, Hastings and many of his contemporaries advocated height limitations for skyscrapers, and later demonstrated (in the Fisk Building, 1920-22, and the Liggett Building, 1919-20) what could be accomplished under the restrictions of New York's Building Zone Law of 1916. Through his understanding of Beaux-Arts principles, Hastings was one of the first to conceive that the skeleton frame which actually supported the building and the exterior sheathing material were separate entities because of their separate functions. By 1894, he was using the term "curtain wall" for the exterior, non-bearing walls of a building as we know it today, and he began to design his buildings to reflect this dichotomy.

Carrère & Hastings' Blair Building (1902, demolished, located on Broad Street, south of the Stock Exchange) was one of their first and most successful efforts at the design of tall buildings. It was constructed when most architects were still debating the proper visual expression of tall buildings and using a tripartite division on their tall building facades, implying the heaviness of the structure through ground-story rustication and deep window reveals. The Blair Building was recognized immediately as something different, its marble facades clearly expressed the fact that they were veneers, and not weight-bearing.¹⁴

The United States Rubber Company Building, although built as part of "Automobile Row" with a large showroom on its ground floor, was primarily an early office tower and as such it expresses the office building sensibility in its design. Like the Blair Building, it is faced in marble and there is little sense of depth on either elevation of the structure. Narrow, continuous stone piers extending from the fourth through seventh stories and from the ninth through nineteenth stories help give the impression that the walls are a thin skin stretched over the steel cage. Although the ornament of the window pediments, elaborate iron balcony railings, and carved stonework around some of the windows is derived from the French Renaissance style, this decoration is clearly subordinate to the main organizing system of recessed windows and continuous piers. The two main facades

of the U.S. Rubber building are treated similarly to each other, although the building is somewhat wider on 58th Street. The strongly-articulated, rounded corner connecting the two sides of Broadway and 58th Street helps reinforce the idea that both facades are part of a well-conceived whole and creates an unusual architectural dynamic along the street. The entire composition is crowned emphatically by its broad, copper, bracketed cornice which continues around both main facades. For many years a large neon sign above the cornice declared the building's ownership to the rest of New York.

The twenty-story building originally had large arched window openings in the lower two stories, that housed retail stores of the United States Tire Company. Ten of the upper floors were used by the U. S. Rubber Company for their offices, while the rest were rented to other businesses.

Subsequent History

In 1911, the U.S. Rubber Company took a twenty-one year lease on this land from Mary Fitzgerald, who had started purchasing numerous lots on this block in 1876. The company was able to purchase the land in 1932. They sold it to a holding company in 1940, remaining in this building until 1951 when they moved to a newer headquarters in Rockefeller Center.

At this time the building was sold to the West Side Federal Savings Bank which wanted a more modern look. They hired architect Herbert Tannenbaum who added an awning over the Broadway entrance to the banking offices. In 1959, at the bank's request, Mr. Tannenbaum completely reconfigured the first two stories of the building, cladding them with a glass and polished gray marble facade.¹⁵ Early in 2000, additional windows were installed at the second story level. The building is still used for offices with a bank in the ground floor.

Description

The United States Rubber Company Building is a twenty-story, Beaux-arts style structure located on the southeast corner of Broadway and 58th Street, with main facades facing both streets. A rounded corner faced in rusticated stone connects the two facades, and the entire structure is capped by a broad copper cornice. Above the two lowest stories, the building is clad in marble, with original metal-sash windows. The two lowest stories are faced with polished gray marble with large modern display windows at the ground floor. The second story has newly-installed, metal casement windows.

Broadway Facade

Floors 1-2: The main entrance to the lobby and elevators which serve the upper stories of this building is in the southernmost bay on the Broadway facade. This entrance and the connecting lobby (which is not part of this designation) were renovated in 1988. The entrance consists of an exterior and interior set of double bronze-and-glass doors (installed during the renovation) topped by a plain glass transom. Outside the doorway, to the south, a small vertical sign is attached to the corner of the building, with the numbers "1790." The rest of the ground story has double-height, plate-glass display windows. The entrance to the bank, which occupies the ground floor commercial space, is located near the corner lot line. It consists of revolving doors recessed slightly behind two corner columns clad in metal. The second story is clad in polished gray marble panels, with seven bays along Broadway. The windows in the two end bays have two sections while all the others have three.

Floors 3-7: Stone bandcourses above the second and seventh stories distinguish this section from those above and below it. Horizontally, the facade is divided into five bays in the center section with one bay on each side. The side bays are faced with rusticated stone, and each has a single, smaller window with original two-over-two metal sash. Each of these side windows is topped by stone voussoirs which merge with the curved spandrel of the floor above. The seventh story is an exception. Here the two windows of the side bays are topped by elaborate carvings including lions' heads, shields, and feathers, which support the small balconies fronting the side windows on the eighth story.

The third story is transitional, with elaborate stone surrounds on each window of the central section. Rounded and triangular pediments alternate above these windows, with flat stone pilasters between each bay. The windows have three-over-three metal sash.

The five center bays of floors four through seven have one-over-one, metal sash windows with metal spandrels, and ornate balcony railings. Continuous, flat stone piers edged with moldings rise between each of the center windows, joining together in segmental arches above the seventh story windows.

8th Floor: This is another transitional story, set off by wide bandcourses above and below it. Each window has three-over-three, metal-framed sash, with engaged pilasters between each bay. The windows in each side bay are capped by rounded pediments which form part of the upper bandcourse.

Floors 9-19: Above the bandcourse is a continuous stone balustrade which extends across the entire facade. On these floors the two end bays are distinct from the five bays in the center. They have smaller, square-headed windows with two-over-two metal sash. In the side bays the windows of each two stories are joined vertically by metal spandrel panels and ornate metal balcony railings. Within the center section, all the windows have one-over-one metal sash. Continuous, flat stone piers with moldings rise between each bay and join together above the windows of the nineteenth story. Floors nine and ten are joined vertically, as are floors 11 through 16 and floors 17 through 19, by metal spandrel panels and ornate iron balcony railings in front of the windows. The windows of the tenth and sixteenth stories have segmentally-arched tops.

Floor 20: The twentieth story is set off by another prominent bandcourse. Twelve windows are evenly spaced across the facade at this level, each with two-over-two metal sash. Each end bay has elaborately carved window surrounds comprised of carved panels with classical ornament.

Cornice: A very broad, projecting copper cornice featuring moldings and brackets tops the building.

Roof: A modern penthouse and a chimney are visible from Broadway and Central Park South.

58th Street Facade

The design of this facade is the same as that on Broadway with the following minor exceptions. On the ground story, there are a freight entrance and a vehicular entrance in the two eastern bays. This facade is slightly wider than that on Broadway, and there are eight rather than seven bays on the second story, while the floors above have six bays in the center section. Along the entire height of the building, the easternmost corner has been refaced with shallow indications of rustication.

The eastern facade of the building is visible over the low building to the east. It is faced in unarticulated brick, with one, square-headed window on each floor, containing three-over-three metal sash.

The southern facade is also visible above the neighboring building to the south. It is also faced with unarticulated brick, pierced by numerous unadorned, square-headed windows.

Report Researched and Written by
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NOTES

1. Ralph C. Epstein, *The Automobile Industry, Its Economic and Commercial Development* (Chicago: A. Shaw Co., 1928), 30.
2. The American Automobile Association and the Association of Licensed Automobile Manufacturers were two such groups, founded early in the century.
3. Frederick H. Elliott, *The New York Times* (Jan. 2, 1910), part 7, p.1.
4. "Real Estate And the Automobile Trade," *The New York Times* (Jan. 6, 1907), part 5, p. 22.
5. Ibid. The dedication of this part of the street to automobiles changed with time. By 1985 the one remaining automobile showroom was located at 1745 Broadway. David W. Dunlap, *On Broadway, A Journey Uptown Over Time* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 194.
6. R.M. DeLeeuw, *Both Sides of Broadway* (New York: DeLeeuw Riehl Publishing Co., 1910), pp. 408-418.
7. "Realty Still in Demand in Automobile District," *The New York Times* (Feb. 21, 1909), part 2, p.10. Other automobile buildings included the Studebaker Brothers Company Building (1902, James Brown Lord, demolished, 1600 Broadway), the Ford Motor Company Building (1917, Albert Kahn, 1710 Broadway), the Fisk Rubber Company Building (1921, Carrère & Hastings, and R.H. Shreve, 1765-1767 Broadway), and the General Motors Corporation Building (1926-27, Shreve & Lamb, 1769-1787 Broadway). Of these early buildings, that built for the Demerest and Peerless companies (1909, Francis H. Kimball, 1758-1770 Broadway) is the only other designated New York City Landmark.
8. "Tallest Broadway Building Above Times Square Section," *The New York Times* (Aug. 6, 1911), part 8, p.1.
9. The information about the U. S. Rubber Company was taken from "The Story of Uniroyal - 75 Years of Progress," an address given by George R. Vila to the Newcomen Society of North America for the Understanding of Material History in the Progress of Mankind, December 7, 1967; and *Histories of the United States Rubber Company, and some of the Subsidiary Companies* (privately printed, 1916).
10. Vila, p. 8.
11. The information in this section was compiled from the following sources: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Staten Island Borough Hall Designation Report (LP-1207)* (NY: City of New York, 1982), report prepared by Andrew Dolkart; LPC, *Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District Report (LP-1834)* (NY: City of New York, 1993), Architects' Appendix; "The Work of Messrs. Carrère & Hastings," *The Architectural Record* 27 (Jan. 1910), pp.1-120.
12. Information in this section was adapted from: David. Gray, *Thomas Hastings Architect* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1933); and LPC, *Staten Island Borough Hall Designation Report*.
13. Thomas Hastings, "The Influence of the École des Beaux-Arts Upon American Architecture," *The Architectural Record*, Beaux Arts Number (Jan., 1901), pp.66-90.
14. H.W. Desmond, "A Beaux-Arts Skyscraper - The Blair Building, New York City," *The Architectural Record* 14 (Dec., 1903), pp. 437-443.
15. New York City Department of Buildings, Alt. 911-1959. For Tannenbaum's concerns about the renovation, see Christopher Gray, "At 90, Architect Reflects on Remodelings He Regrets," *The New York Times* (Feb. 27, 2000).

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 (Former) United States Rubber Company 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 (former) United States Rubber Company Building, was constructed in 1911-12 as the headquarters for a major, influential rubber goods manufacturer; that the twenty-story structure, with a United States Tire Company store in its ground story showroom, was built during the early years of New York's "Automobile Row," and held a prominent place in that collection of automobile-related buildings which lined the sides of Broadway from the 40s to the 70s; that the building was designed by the distinguished architectural firm of Carrère & Hastings, which had first gained acclaim in 1897 for the prize-winning design of the New York Public Library (a designated New York City Landmark); that these architects were among the first of their contemporaries to show in the design of the building that the exterior walls were not weight-bearing, and that the marble facades were veneer over its steel skeleton; that the building's thin, continuous stone piers and shallow window reveals furthered this idea; that the architects used ornamentation based on French Renaissance sources, such as pediments, columns, shields and swags to create an elaborate, highly decorative structure; that the broad copper cornice and unique rounded corner create a distinctive presence for this building in midtown Manhattan.

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 (Former) United States Rubber Company building, 1790 Broadway (aka 1784-1790 Broadway and 234 West 58th Street), and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1029, Lot 53 as its Landmark Site.



(Former) UNITED STATES RUBBER COMPANY BUILDING
1790 Broadway, Manhattan
Photo: Carl Forster



(Former) United States Rubber Company Building
Ground Story Details
Photos: Carl Forster





Ground story entrance



Window details
Photos: Carl Forster

(Former) United States Rubber Company Building



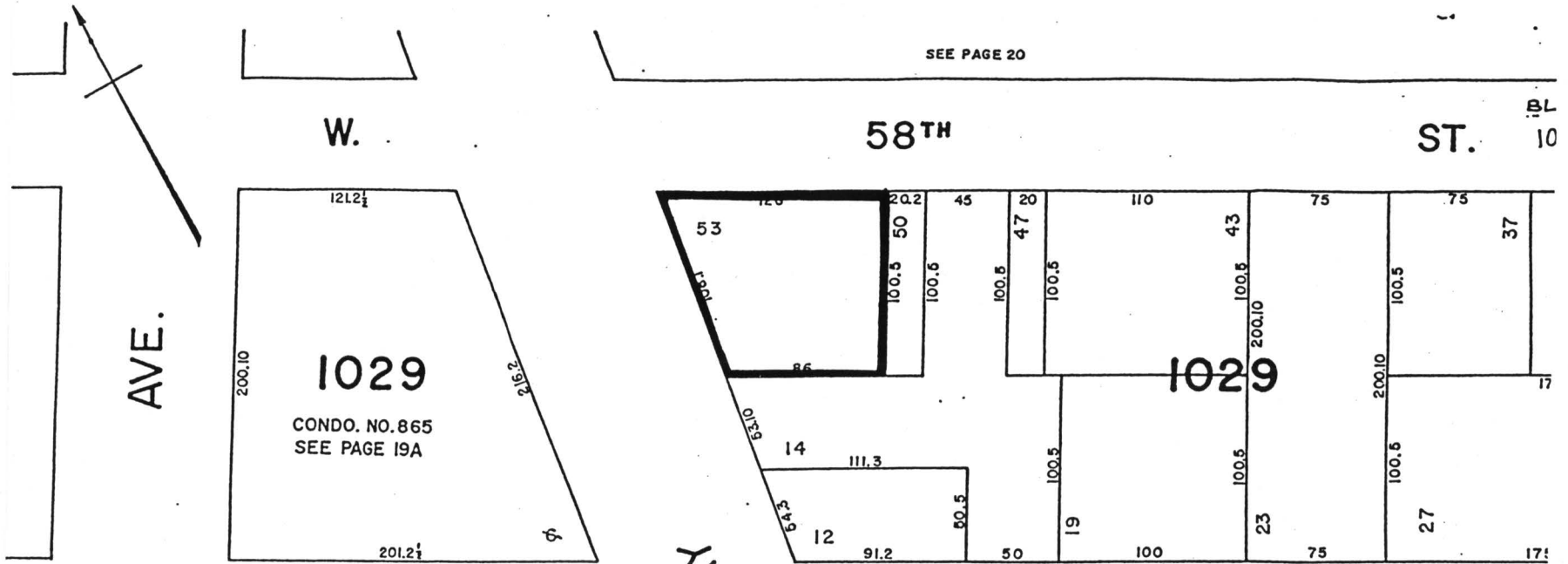
(Former) United States Rubber Company Building
Window Details
Photos: Carl Forster



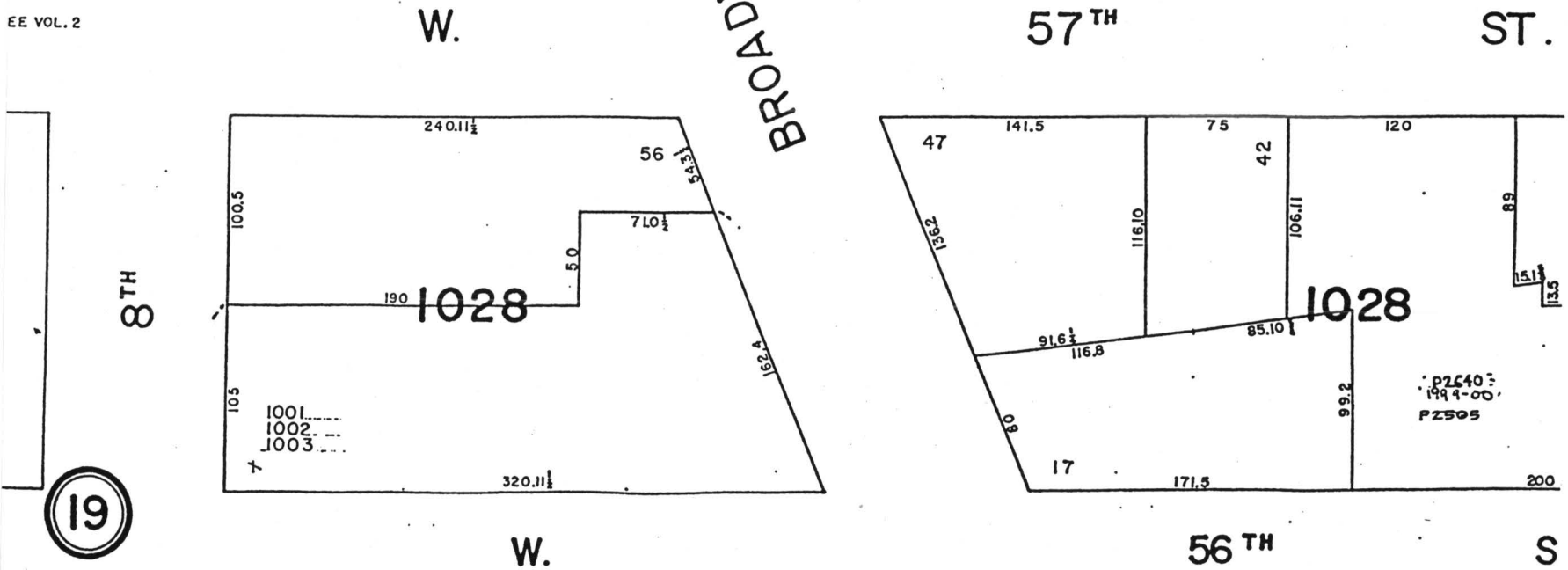


(Former) United States Rubber Company Building
Cornice and facade details
Photos: Carl Forster

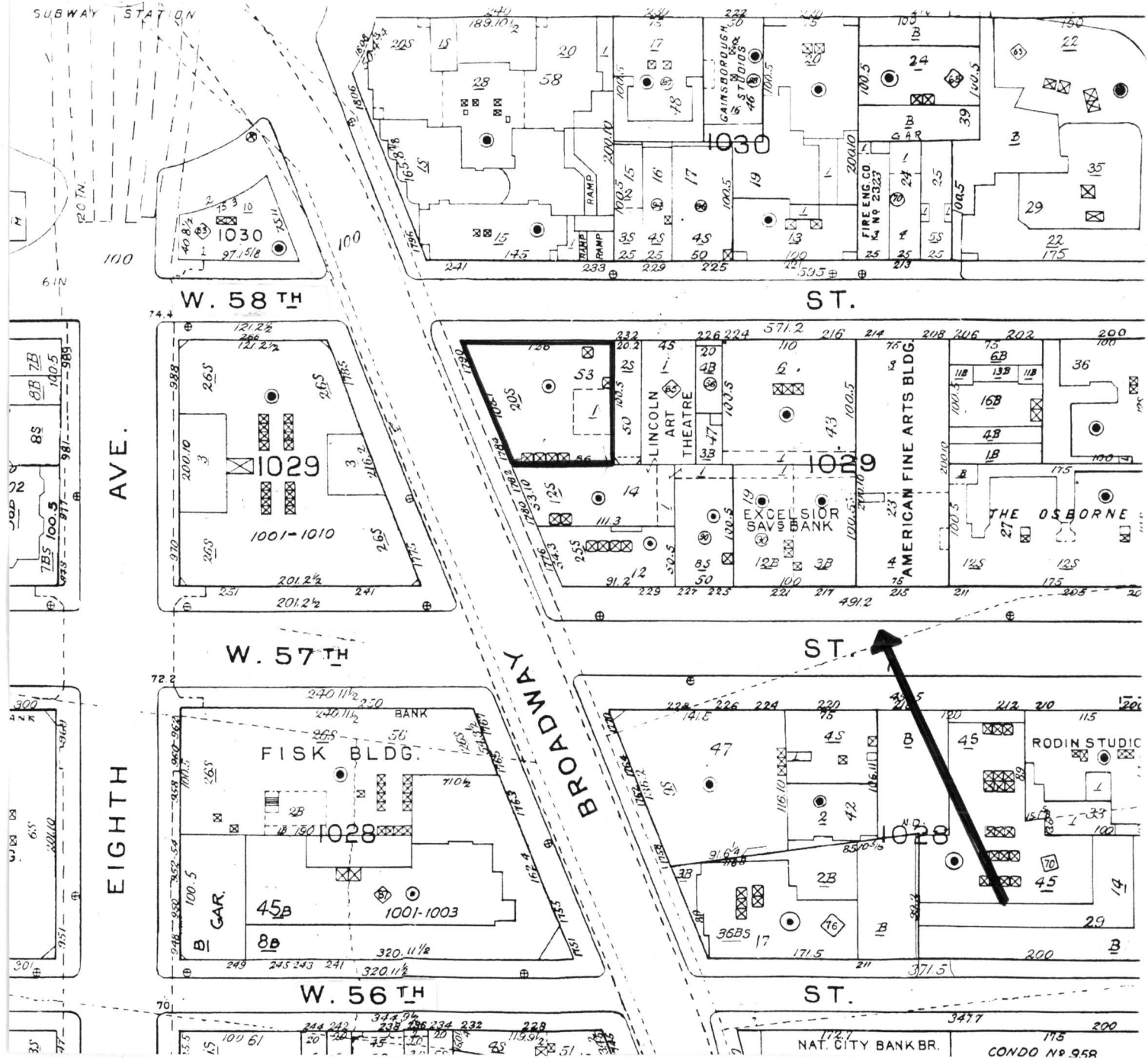




EE VOL. 2



(Former) United States Rubber Company Building
 1790 Broadway (aka 1784-1790 Broadway and 234 West 58th Street) Manhattan
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1029, Lot 53
 Source: Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax map



(Former) United States Rubber Company Building
 1790 Broadway (aka 1784-1790 Broadway and 234 West 58th Street) Manhattan
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1029, Lot 53
 Source: Sanborn Manhattan Landbook, 1999-2000, Plate 82