

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received AUG 18 1983

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Liberty Tower

and or common

2. Location

street & number 55 Liberty Street ^e not for publication

city, town New York vicinity of

state New York code 036 county New York code 061

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name 55 Liberty Owners Corp. % William B. May & Co., Inc.

street & number 3 West 57th Street

city, town New York vicinity of state N.Y. 10019

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New York County Register's Office

street & number 31 Chambers Street

city, town New York state N. Y. 10007

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

(LP-1243)
title Landmarks Preservation Commission has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date August 24, 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records Landmarks Preservation Commission - 20 Vesey Street

city, town New York state N. Y. 10007

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved

date _____ NA _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Liberty Tower is a thirty-three story steel frame skyscraper built on water-proof subsurface caissons. It is located between Liberty Street, Liberty Place and Nassau Street in lower Manhattan, completely filling its small lot. The building is free-standing on three sides (photo 1) with the fourth side abutting low-rise commercial structures. The building's three major elevations are clad entirely in white terra cotta and the fourth is faced with white brick.

The building is designed with a traditional three-part composition (photo 2). The base consists of the first two stories, slightly rusticated, the second story being slightly taller than the rest. Stores occupy most of the first floor. The base is divided from the next three floors by a string course. These three stories act as a transition to the shaft; the windows, which have unadorned spandrels, are paired beneath drip lintels on the lower levels, while at the fifth floor they are capped by small cornices. Above the fifth floor the shaft rises, in identical stories, up to the twenty-third floor. Each of these stories has piers between the bays emphasizing the verticality of the shaft, and each has blind Gothic arcades in the spandrels. Beneath and above the twenty-third floor are ornate terra-cotta cornices supported by brackets, with grotesque figures on the piers on the cornice under the twenty-third floor; there are also cornices beneath and above the twenty-seventh floor and above the twenty-eighth floor. The cornice above the twenty-seventh floor projects further from the wall than the other two and is more ornate. Above the twenty-third floor the flat piers of the lower floors become rounded pilasters at the corners.

The copper-clad roof begins at the level of the thirtieth floor and rises 64 feet (photo 4). Inside the roof above the thirtieth floor are the attic floor, the superintendent's floor, and the tank floor. Corners of the roof are adorned with pilasters with pinnacles crowned with finials. The dormers are flanked by small piers surmounted by animals cast in terra cotta.

The main facade of the building is the Liberty Street front. It is divided into three bays and has one large dormer at the roof which is a continuation of the central bay. The side bays have paired double-hung sash windows; the central bay has two groups of paired double-hung sash windows that are a little bit smaller than the windows of the side bays and continue into the large dormer at the thirtieth floor.

The entrance consists of the door opening with a Tudor arch. The bronze and glass entrance doors are surmounted by a bronze transom incorporating Gothic arcades. Above the entrance, extending up to the fifth story, is a four-sided bay window, with double-hung sash windows, surmounted by battlements (photo 5). The door opening and the bay window are flanked by paneled buttresses with pinnacles, rising four stories.

The Liberty Place and Nassau Street fronts are almost identical. Each extends five bays, with the second and fourth bays continuing into large dormers at the roof. The double-hung sash windows in each are paired on both fronts, except for the south bay of the Liberty Place front, where the windows are tripled, reflecting the difference in length of the two sides of the lot.

On all three main elevations the cornices running beneath and above the twenty-seventh floor are interrupted and do not extend across the windows of the bays that continue into the dormers. The north front, faced with white brick with terra-cotta

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Continuation sheet Liberty Tower
New York County, N. Y.

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Page 2

detail, is practically plain (photo 3).

Liberty Tower was used for commercial offices until 1979, at which time it was converted to co-operative apartments. In conjunction with this conversion the ground level of the building is being restored to its original configuration. The lowest level contains storefronts which open onto the street, one flanking each side of the central building entrance on Liberty Street and five on the Nassau Street elevation. Permastone siding is being removed from the piers between each store to reveal the original plain limestone. Shop windows are plain sheet glass set in metal frames. The floor above this contains a public restaurant, accessible by a marble staircase just inside the main doors. This interior entranceway is also highlighted by marble wainscoting and a vaulted ceiling decorated with modern murals.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1909–10 **Builder/Architect** Henry Ives Cobb

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Liberty Tower is historically and architecturally significant as an exceptional example of the early twentieth century romantically inspired skyscrapers that changed the skyline of New York City.¹ Conceived of as a speculative office building, Liberty Tower was designed in 1909 by Henry Ives Cobb, a nationally known architect whose training was influenced by the principles of both the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Chicago School. Cobb's design for Liberty Tower combines innovative building technology with traditional Gothic style decoration. A modern steel-cage skyscraper built on water-proof caissons, Liberty Tower retains the traditional three-part vertical division characteristic of late nineteenth century design. Its "modern" terra-cotta cladding takes the traditional forms of pointed arches, pinnacles and grotesque figures. Prominently sited so that it is visible from three sides, Liberty Tower remains one of the most distinctive skyscrapers in lower Manhattan.

The site of the Liberty Tower building was occupied during most of the last half of the nineteenth century by William Cullen Bryant's New York Evening Post building. In 1909, the property came into the hands of the Liberty-Nassau Building Company. They erected Liberty Tower as a speculative office building for the financial district, within whose confines it stood. They intended it to be an elegant building, catering to the needs of a professional clientele such as stock brokers, financial institutions, and lawyers.

Henry Ives Cobb (1858–1931) was chosen as architect for this project. He received engineering training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Harvard University, studying with William Ware and learning the traditional methods of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Cobb lived and worked in Chicago from 1881 to 1896, formative years for the innovative Chicago School architects. From them he learned the new technical advances in construction, but he was less receptive to their stylistic developments, preferring to stay within the historical modes of his earlier training.

In Chicago, Cobb's major commissions were for the Chicago Opera House, the Newberry Library, the Chicago Historical Society Building and the Chicago Athletic Association Building. He participated in the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 designing several buildings and serving on the Board of Architects. In 1896 Cobb moved to Washington, D. C., where he designed several buildings for American University. In 1902, he moved to New York, where he built mostly office and commercial buildings, among them the building at 42 Broadway and the Harriman Bank Building as well as Liberty Tower.

In 1909, when Cobb was hired to design Liberty Tower, New York was seeing the construction of increasingly high towers designed in historic styles. These included Ernest Flagg's Singer Building (1908), with its tall Beaux-Arts-inspired tower, and Napoleon LeBrun's Metropolitan Life Tower (1909, National Historic Landmark listed, 1978). They would soon be eclipsed by Cass Gilbert's Gothic style Woolworth Building (1913, National Historic Landmark listed, 1966). These skyscrapers

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than 1 acre.

Quadrangle name Jersey City, N.J. - N.Y.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

118	58361510	41501661710
Zone	Easting	Northing

B

Zone	Easting	Northing

C

--	--	--

D

--	--	--

E

--	--	--

F

--	--	--

G

--	--	--

H

--	--	--

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is on Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 64, Lot 8, as outlined on the attached map, with a scale of 1" = 120'.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries NA

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

contact:

name/title Larry Gobrecht National Register Program Coordinator

organization Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau date March 1983

street & number Agency Bldg #1, E.S.P. telephone (518) 474-0479

city or town Albany state New York

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Commissioner

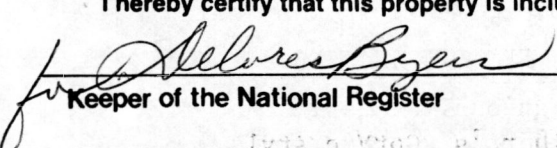
date 8/16/83

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the National Register

date 9/15/83

for 
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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Liberty Tower

Continuation sheet New York County, N.Y.

Item number 8

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were the culmination of the development of the tall steel-cage office structure that had begun in the late nineteenth century, and they set the standard for the "romantic skyscrapers" of the first half of the twentieth century.

Cobb brought the influences of both the Ecole des Beaux Arts and the Chicago School to bear on his design for Liberty Tower. Without breaking completely from the tripartite skyscraper division of base-shaft-capital, Cobb managed to merge the three elements in the tower design. His use of full terra-cotta cladding was one of the first in New York.² Using this new material in traditional forms such as Gothic arches, pilasters and bracketed cornices, Cobb created a distinguished example of the new skyscraper.

Throughout his career, the Gothic style was one of Cobb's favorites and Liberty Tower was one of his most successful essays in the style. With its picturesque forms and roofline, Liberty Tower remains today as one of the most distinctive buildings in lower Manhattan.

Footnotes

1. This report was taken almost in its entirety from the text of the Landmarks Preservation Commission designation report, Liberty Tower (LP-1243), August 24, 1982, by Lydia Latchinova.

2. Louis Sullivan had used full terra-cotta cladding in his Bayard-Condict Building of 1897-99, but the use of terra-cotta cladding was slow to be adopted in New York.

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Continuation sheet Liberty Tower
New York County, N.Y. Item number 9 Page 2

"The Bryant Building Substructure." Engineering Record, 61 (May 32, 1910), 665-667.

Lewis, Julius. "Henry Ives Cobb and The Chicago School." Unpublished Masters Thesis.
Chicago: University of Chicago, 1954.

The Liberty Tower, New York. New York: Liberty - Nassau Building Company, 1910.

New York. Landmarks Preservation Commission. Research files: Liberty Tower.

Weisman, Winston. "A New View of Skyscraper History." The Rise of an American
Architecture, ed. by Edgar Kaufman, Jr. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970.

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Continuation sheet Liberty Tower
New York County, New York Item number 11

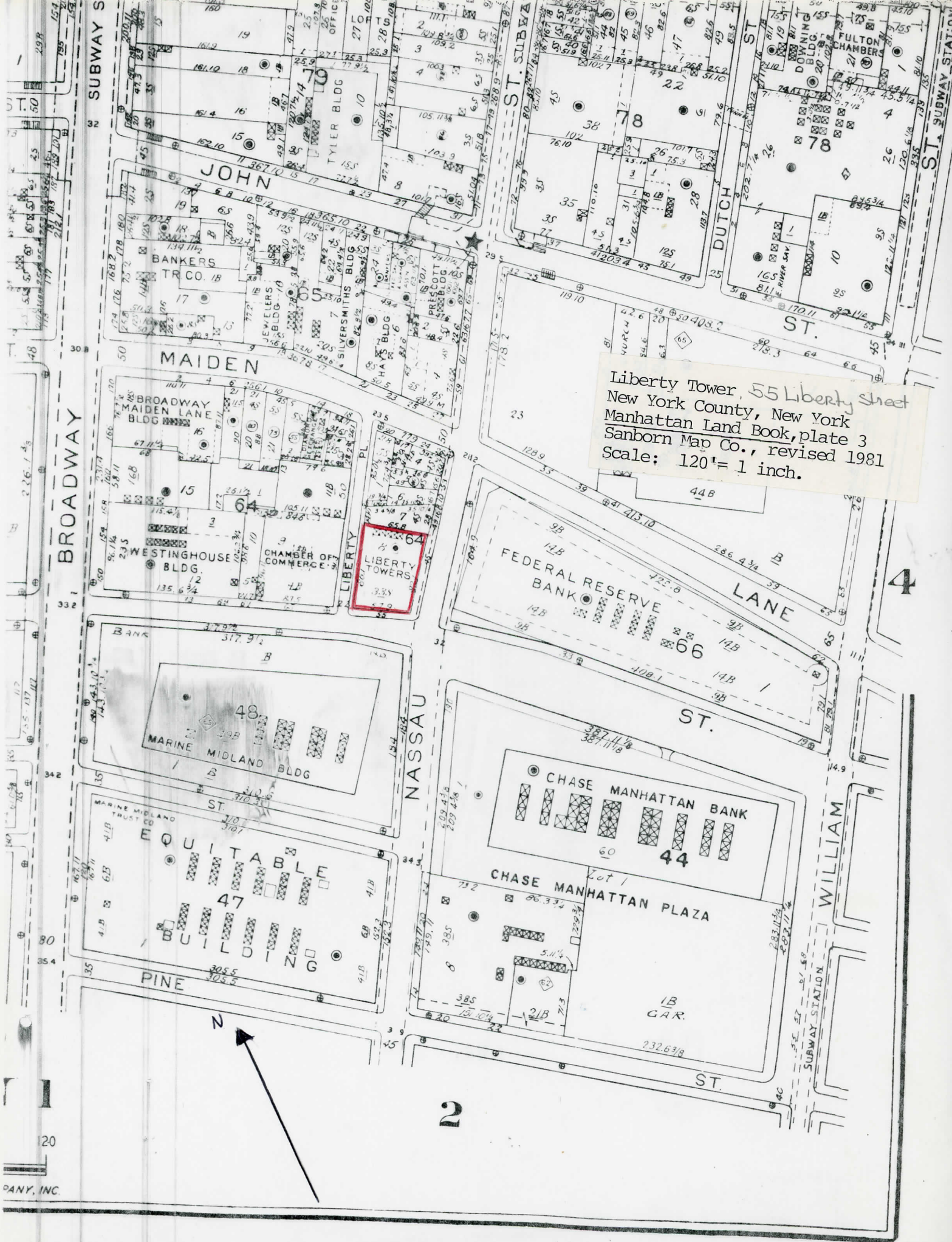
Page 2

Report Researched and Prepared by:

Virginia Kurshan
Landmarks Preservation Commission
20 Vesey Street
New York, N.Y. 10007

November 1982
(212) 566-7577

Liberty Tower, 55 Liberty Street
New York County, New York
Manhattan Land Book, plate 3
Sanborn Map Co., revised 1981
Scale: 120" = 1 inch.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Liberty Tower
New York County
NEW YORK

Working No. AUG 18 1983
Fed. Reg. Date: 2.1.84
Date Due: 9/15/83 - 10/2/83
Action: ACCEPT 9/15/83
 RETURN
 REJECT
Federal Agency: _____

Entered in the _____
National Register _____

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review: sample request appeal NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____
Reviewer _____
Discipline _____
Date _____
_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name _____

2. Location _____

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property _____

5. Location of Legal Description _____

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? yes no

7. Description

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Condition | Check one | Check one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> altered | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection

8. Significance

Period _____ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates _____

Builder/Architect _____

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national ____ state ____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title _____ date _____

13. Other

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____



1. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View from the south



2. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View from the southeast



3. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View from the northeast



4. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

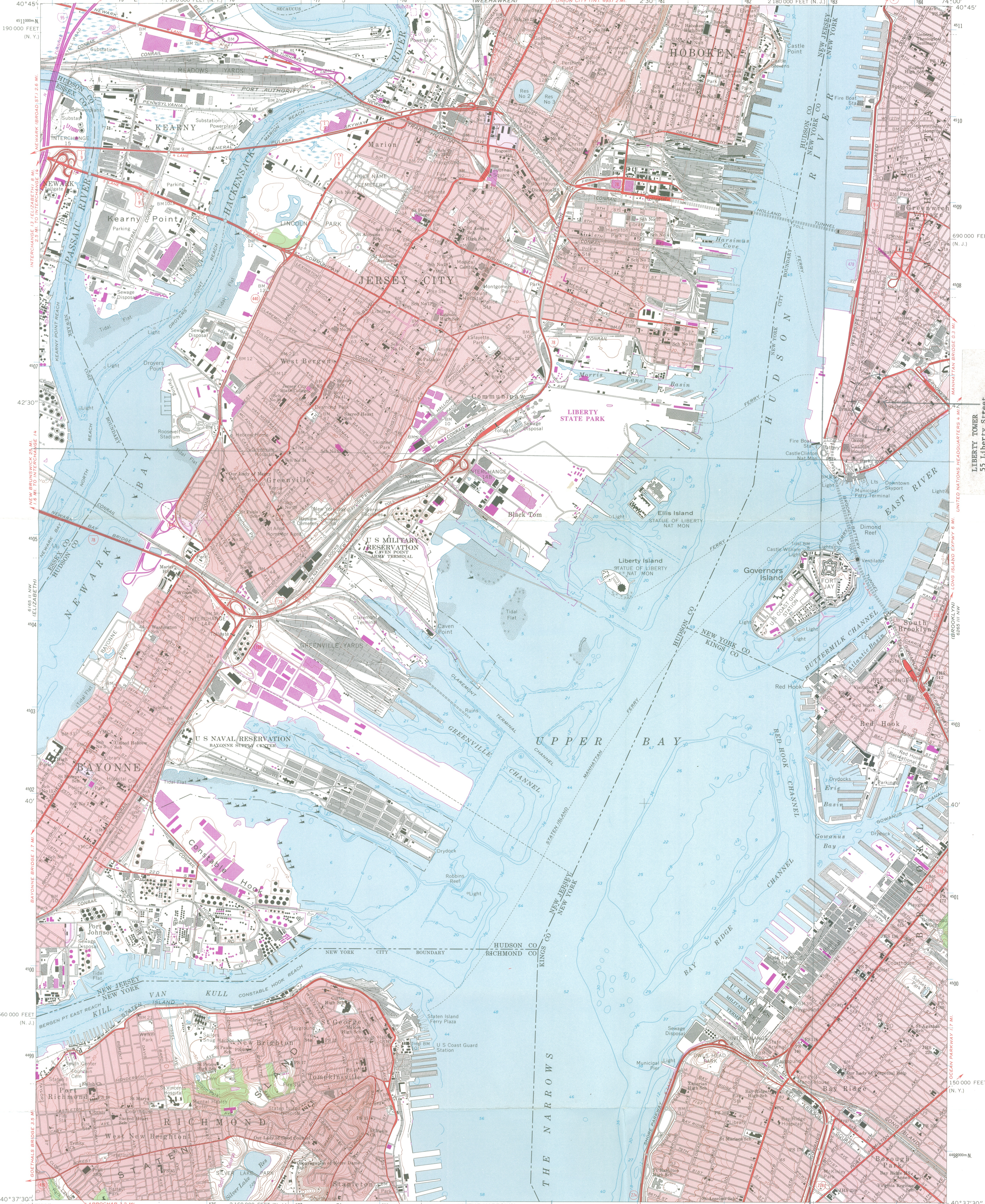
Detail, Liberty Street facade
and roofline



5. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Detail, Liberty Street facade



LIBERTY TOWER
55 Liberty Street
New York County, N.Y.
UTM References:
18 383650 4506670
Jersey City, NJ-NY Quad
Scale-- 1:24,000

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Revised in cooperation with New York Department of Transportation
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, USACE, New Jersey Geodetic Survey,
and City of New York Board of Estimate and Apportionment
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods and from NOS charts T-5111,
T-5277, T-5332, T-5450, T-5453, T-5454, T-5460, T-5461, T-5466, T-5468,
T-5469, and T-5470
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken
1954 and planimetric surveys 1955. Revised from aerial photographs
taken 1966. Field checked 1967
Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS charts 285, 287, 541,
and 745 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes
Polyconic projection, 10,000-foot grid ticks based on New Jersey coordinate
system, and New York coordinate system, Long Island zone, 1000-meter
Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue, 1927
North American Datum. To place on the predicted North American Datum
1983 move the projection lines 6 meters south and 35 meters west as shown
by dashed corner ticks
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map

Scale 1:24,000
1 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET
1 5 10 15 20 25 30 KILOMETER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET-- DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 4.4 FEET IN
UPPER BAY AND 4.8 FEET IN NEWARK BAY

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs
taken 1976 and other sources. This information not
field checked. Map edited 1981
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, all weather, hard surface
Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface
Light-duty road, all weather, improved surface
Unimproved road, fair or dry weather

Interstate Route U. S. Route State Route

QUADRANGLE LOCATION
JERSEY CITY, N. J. - N. Y.
N4037.5 - W7400/7.5
1967
PHOTOREVISED 1981
DMA 6165 II NE - SERIES V822