



NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Robert B. Tierney
Chairman

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LANDMARKS NAMED IN DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN AND MIDTOWN MANHATTAN

Former Brooklyn Union Gas Co. Headquarters, Now Part of St. Francis College, and a City Parks Recreation Center Originally Built as a Free Public Bathhouse Recognized for Their Architectural Integrity and Connection to New York City's Growth at the Start of the 20th Century



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today unanimously approved as landmarks the former headquarters of the Brooklyn Union Gas Company in Downtown Brooklyn and a former public bathhouse in Midtown Manhattan, both symbols of the City's rapid growth at the beginning of the 20th century.

The **Brooklyn Union Gas Company** building, now part of the St. Francis College campus at 176 Remsen St., was completed in 1914 and designed by Frank Freeman, a prolific Brooklyn architect who was best known for muscular Romanesque Revival style buildings, including the c. 1893 Eagle Warehouse and Storage Company Building on nearby Fulton Street.

Designed in the neo-Classical style, the gas company's eight-story office structure was built to centralize its growing operations, and was one of several large commercial buildings constructed during a new wave of development in Downtown Brooklyn following the consolidation of Greater New York in 1898.

Brooklyn Union Gas Co. was formed through a merger of seven Brooklyn gas manufacturers in 1895, and initially had 100,000 customers. At the time, the conglomerate's manufactured gas was used primarily for illumination, including street lighting. The company grew as new uses for manufactured gas emerged, such as cooking and heating.

The limestone-clad building is adorned with ornament advertising the company's product such as torches and flaming oil lamps (see photo at right). It features a two-story granite base that's distinguished by a projecting entrance portico flanked by fluted columns and topped by an entablature and cornice.



"This stately building is a reminder of a company that literally fueled the growth of a newly expanded City in the first decades of the 20th century, and recalls a time when Downtown Brooklyn was establishing itself as a major urban center," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney.

Brooklyn Union Gas ended gas manufacturing operations in 1952, after financing a pipeline that brought natural gas to the City from Texas and the South. The company remained in the building until 1962, the year it moved to new headquarters at 195 Montague St. and sold it to St. Francis. Brooklyn Union Gas merged with the Long Island Lighting Company and several smaller utilities in 1998 to form the KeySpan Corporation in 1998, which was absorbed by National Grid USA in 2007.



The **East 54th Street Bath and Gymnasium**, at 342-348 E. 54th Street in Manhattan, is the 12th of 13 free indoor public baths constructed by the City between 1901 and 1914 as part of a campaign to improve public health among residents of crowded tenements that had no baths or showers.

Located between First and Second Avenues, the East 54th Street Bath opened in 1911 when the neighborhood was comprised of factories, breweries and tenements. The facility included 79 showers for men and 59 for women, a gymnasium, swimming pool, running track and roof playground and had the capacity to handle as many as 2.5 million baths a year.

The East 54th Street bathhouse was designed in the Classical Revival style and trimmed with Arts and Crafts details by the (August) Windolph and (Harold) Werner. The firm was responsible for the West 60th Street Bath and Gymnasium at 232 West 60th Street, as well as several other residential and institutional buildings in New York City, including the sprawling Headquarters Troop Armory in Staten Island (c. 1927, a designated New York City landmark).

The three-story building, which incorporates design elements from European bathhouse designs, is clad in brick and stone. The facade is distinguished by three large, recessed arched openings divided by four monumental brick columns featuring limestone capitals decorated with Poseidon's trident and intertwined winged dolphins symbolizing the caduceus.

"The building's presence on the street is as powerful as the reform movement that led to its construction," said Chairman Tierney. "It's lasting proof of a continuing commitment the City of New York made more than 100 years ago to protect and improve the health of its citizens."

The East 54th Street facility ceased operation as a free bathhouse in the 1930s, as housing standards improved and the neighborhood began to gentrify. The New York City Parks Department assumed responsibility for the facility in 1938 and renovated it into a community and recreation center that was renamed Recreation Center Fifty-Four in 1998, and remains in operation.

In other business, the Commission voted to hold a public hearing on a proposal to landmark the former R.H. Macy & Company store, a c. 1898 Beaux-Arts style building at 56 West 14th Street in Manhattan, and held a public hearing on proposals to landmark the interior and exterior of the Art Deco Cities Service building, also known as the AIG building, at 70 Pine Street in Manhattan.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the mayoral agency responsible for protecting and preserving New York City's architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 27,000 buildings, including 1,286 individual landmarks, 111 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks, 102 historic districts and 16 historic district extensions in all five boroughs. Under the City's landmarks law, considered among the most powerful in the nation, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough.

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