

M. H. RENKEN DAIRY COMPANY OFFICE BUILDING AND ENGINE ROOM BUILDING

582-584 Myrtle Avenue and 580 Myrtle Avenue, Brooklyn

Block: 1909 / Lot 32 in its entirety and Lots 1001 and 1002 in part, consisting of that portion of Lots 1001 and 1002 lying north of a line beginning at a point on the eastern boundary line of Lots 1001 and 1002 that is 61.21 feet south of the northern boundary line of Lots 1001 and 1002, thence running westerly, parallel with the northern boundary line of Lots 1001 and 1002, to a point on the western boundary line of Lots 1001 and 1002

Built: Office Building, 1932; Engine Room Building, c.1860; Main Facade 1936-37

Architect: Koch & Wagner (1932; 1936-37 Main Façade of Engine Room Building)

Owner: Renken Dairy

Style: Art Moderne

Previous Actions: calendared November 20, 2012, September 17, 2013;

Heard April 2, 2013, October 29, 2013

Significant Alterations: Office Building: Modern main-entrance light fixture and storefront security gate and bracket sign on Myrtle Avenue facade; ground-story openings lowered or filled with brick, selective brick replacement, and window grilles on Classon Avenue facade. Engine Room Building: Ground-story display window opening altered to accommodate door opening and filled with non-historic infill; ground story painted; louver, gate box, and box awning at ground story; replacement windows; window grilles and gates at second and third stories; portion of cornice damaged

The M.H. Renken Dairy Company Office and Engine Room Buildings are two structures with a unified Art Moderne style design in Brooklyn's Clinton Hill neighborhood.

Milk drinking was rare until the mid-1800s and risky into the 1900s, but New York City industrialists, public officials, and public-health advocates played a major role in improving its safety and quality, and by the 1920s, New York was recognized as having "the best milk supply of any large city in the world." German immigrant Martin H. Renken founded his dairy in 1888; around 1903, it moved to the block on which these buildings stand, and by 1914, the company had built up an impressive dairying complex. In the 1930s, Renken was at its peak; the third-largest dairy in New York City, it pasteurized and bottled more than seven million quarts of fresh milk annually, operated 300 delivery routes, and owned several creameries in rural New York and Pennsylvania. Reflecting its prosperity, the company demolished two 19th-century buildings at 582 and 586 Myrtle Avenue and, in 1932, erected a new office building. Five years later, it completed the renovation of the circa-1860 building to its west, at 580 Myrtle, to contain an engine room and storage space, with a new front façade that matched the design of the office building.



The office building and front façade of the engine room building were designed by Koch & Wagner. "Modernistic" in design and faced in beige enameled brick to convey a hygienic image, the Renken buildings are primarily Art Moderne in style, featuring patterned- and dark-brick "speed lines" and bracketless, streamlined cornices, as well as Art Deco touches. The buildings also incorporate International Style influences, particularly those of Dutch modernism, which are visible in the buildings' balanced asymmetry and creative interplay of projecting and receding rectangular planes.

Renken ended milk processing at this location in 1959, and both buildings housed a variety of businesses afterward. Remarkably well-preserved, these buildings are strikingly early examples of American architecture incorporating International Style influences, and distinguished remnants of a once-bustling dairy complex. Dating from the period in which New York's milk was known for its outstanding quality following decades of innovation and reform, they also recall the city's signature role in improving milk's safety and quality and in making fresh cow's milk a major part of the American diet.

Public Hearing—June 2, 2015 (Caratzas)