

275 MADISON AVENUE BUILDING, originally 22 East 40th Street Building (aka 273-277 Madison Avenue; 22-26 East 40th Street), Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1930-31; Kenneth Franzheim, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 869, Lot 54.

On June 24, 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 275 Madison Avenue Building and the proposed designation of its related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three people, including a representative of the building's owner and representatives of the Historic Districts Council and the Municipal Art Society, spoke in favor of designation.

Summary

Rising 43 stories in height and completed in 1931, 275 Madison Avenue is an outstanding Art Deco skyscraper dating from the end of New York's 1920s and early-1930s skyscraper boom. Designed by noted architect Kenneth Franzheim, the building features a striking polished-granite base; three stories high with tall rectangular openings, it was treated by Franzheim as a "stage setting" with a compelling black-and-silver color scheme and rich abstract ornament. Rising above the base is a dramatically massed, slab-form tower that steps back repeatedly before narrowing to a nearly square plan at its upper floors. Like the nearby Daily News Building completed the year before, 275 Madison is best described as a transitional work, bridging the exuberant, "modernistic" Art Deco style and the spare, sculptural qualities of the International Style. Franzheim's "exclusion of obstructive ornament" was promoted as making the building's interiors "virtually shadowless," but it also adds to the tower's streamlined effect and the vertical emphasis created by its alternating white-brick stripes and dark window bands.



No. 275 Madison Avenue was developed by Houston Properties, a New York-based firm founded by Jesse H. Jones, who built nearly all of the skyscrapers constructed in Houston, Tex. during the first half of the twentieth century. A nationally known figure, Jones also served as Secretary of Commerce and Chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a position in which he was "probably the most powerful financial baron in the nation." This building is one of a handful completed in New York City by Franzheim, an accomplished, versatile, and innovative architect who was a prominent designer of theaters, department stores, apartment houses, and office buildings. Famed photographer Berenice Abbott photographed 275 Madison as part of her "Changing New York" series, and it remains, to this day, one of the finer skyscrapers of the period.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Murray Hill¹

Completed in 1931 at the southeast corner of Madison Avenue and East 40th Street, the building now known as 275 Madison Avenue stands at the northern edge of Murray Hill—one of Manhattan’s most prestigious old residential neighborhoods—where it meets the vibrant commercial district to its north formerly known as the “Grand Central Zone.” Generally extending from East 34th to East 40th Streets, and from Madison to Third Avenues, Murray Hill’s historic core lies several blocks south of 40th Street, on lands that formed the eighteenth-century country estate of Robert Murray and his wife, Mary.² Roughly bounded on the south and north by present-day East 33rd and East 38th Streets, the Murray estate reached from the old Middle Road—near present-day Madison Avenue—to the Eastern Post Road, an old route to Boston located close to present-day Lexington Avenue.

Murray Hill’s development as a premier residential district was intimately connected with the construction of the New York & Harlem Railroad, which began in 1831. Prohibited from operating steam locomotives south of 14th Street, the New York & Harlem constructed a depot just south of Murray Hill, where passengers could transfer between steam trains and the horsecars that operated farther downtown. In 1851, the Harlem Railroad—together with the New York & New Haven Railroad, which ran along the same right-of-way—began converting their open railroad cut, completed through Murray Hill in the 1830s, into a tunnel. Covenants instituted in the 1830s and 1840s limited development on the former Murray estate to brick and stone dwellings, churches, and private stables, and prohibited uses that could present fire hazards, generate noxious odors, or draw crowds of strangers to the neighborhood.

Murray Hill’s residential development began in earnest in 1851-53, when three members of the Phelps family erected elegant and luxurious mansions on the east side of Madison Avenue between East 36th and East 37th Streets. By 1858, much of the area had been transformed, with most of its new houses purchased by merchants who owned businesses in Lower Manhattan and commuted to work via the Harlem Railroad or the Third Avenue horsecars. At the end of the nineteenth century, the neighborhood was home to members of New York’s most prominent families, including the Belmonts, Delanos, Rhinelanders, and Tiffanys. Today, Murray Hill retains much of its nineteenth-century character; most of the area bounded by East 35th and East 38th Streets, and by Park and Lexington Avenues, was designated a New York City Historic District in 2002, with a district extension following two years later.

The “Grand Central Zone”

By the late 1910s, strong commercial pressure was pushing down on Murray Hill from the intersection of Park Avenue and 42nd Street, where the mammoth and bustling new Grand Central Terminal (Reed & Stem and Warren & Wetmore, a designated New York City Landmark) had been completed in 1913. So great were the expectations for the area surrounding the terminal as a commercial district and “notable center of artistic structures” that the area was christened the “Grand Central Terminal Zone” a year before Grand Central opened.³ By 1917, “the blocks immediately north and south of 42nd Street in the terminal zone [composed] one of the liveliest commercial quarters of the city,” and four years later, 100 million people—equal to the entire population of the United States—were passing through the terminal each year.⁴

The Grand Central Zone emerged in the late 1920s as one of the city’s great skyscraper districts. As developer Irwin Chanin explained in 1929—the year in which his firm completed its namesake 56-story building (Sloan & Robertson, 1927-29, a designated New York City Landmark) at 42nd Street and Lexington Avenue—the area possessed many advantages over the older Lower Manhattan business district from which it was drawing tenants. Compared with the Wall Street area, which had become “widely separated from railway terminals, hotels, clubs, theaters, and such important centers as the garment, fur, furniture, millinery, and jewelry industries,” the Grand Central area was much more convenient for “our typical big businessman [who] now lives in the Park Avenue

district, in Westchester County, or on Long Island.”⁵ Skyscraper construction boomed in the Grand Central Zone in 1929; eight new skyscrapers totaling 249 stories were being readied for occupancy that year, including Warren & Wetmore’s 34-story New York Central Building (a designated New York City Landmark), the Chanin Building, and the 44-story office building at 10 East 40th Street designed by Ludlow & Peabody and constructed by Houston Properties, the developer of 275 Madison Avenue. Five skyscrapers totaling 220 stories were being readied for 1930 occupancy.⁶

Following the October 1929 stock market crash and the subsequent Depression, office building construction slowed to a crawl in the Grand Central Zone, as it did throughout the city; No. 275 Madison Avenue was among the few skyscrapers begun in the Grand Central district in the crash’s aftermath. For a period of about fifteen years between the early 1930s and late 1940s, no new major office buildings were completed in the Grand Central Zone.⁷

New York’s Art Deco Skyscrapers⁸

America’s involvement in World War I, followed by a recession in the early 1920s, caused a construction lull in New York City, as in other parts of the country. By the mid 1920s, the economy had bounced back, and demand for new and larger commercial buildings was booming. Fifteen new office skyscrapers were erected in New York in 1925, and 1926 saw the construction of 30 more, an annual number that still had not been equaled 50 years later.⁹ This building frenzy lasted through the 1929 stock market crash, as construction went forward in the early 1930s on buildings that had already been planned and financed; although largely finished by 1932, the boom left behind a “rich array of towers,” many of them executed in what is known today as the Art Deco style.¹⁰ Indeed, several of New York’s most spectacular skyscrapers from this period—including the Chanin Building, the Chrysler Building (William Van Alen, 1928-30), the Empire State Building (Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, 1929-31) and the General Electric Building (Cross & Cross, 1929-31), all designated New York City Landmarks, are among the country’s most significant examples of Art Deco design.

Into the 1910s, no limits on building height or bulk existed in New York City. In 1916, New York implemented the nation’s first zoning regulations, which permitted unrestricted height on one-quarter of a building site, but required skyscrapers to taper as they rose to allow light and air to reach the street. Six years later, architect and critic Harvey Wiley Corbett (1873-1954) and architectural delineator Hugh Ferriss (1889-1962) first published a group of dramatic renderings that explored zoning’s impact on the shape of tall buildings. Presented as a series of illustrations progressing from the abstract, pyramidal shape of the zoning envelope to a stepped-back practicable building form, these drawings were profoundly influential, catalyzing a trend in which “buildings endeavored to take on the feeling of sculpted mountains, their shape suddenly more important than their historical detail or even their style.”¹¹ So pervasive were the new stepped-back skyscrapers that by the mid-1920s, architects and critics spoke of an emerging “setback style”; these buildings “helped to popularize an aesthetic of simple, sculptural mass that became the benchmark of progressive design.”¹²

Another important influence on 1920s skyscraper design was Eliel Saarinen’s 1922 competition entry for the Chicago Tribune’s new tower. With its straightforward shape, vertical emphasis, and limited ornament, Saarinen’s ahistorical design was “taken to be style-less and was thought in the twenties to have freed architects from what seemed the inevitable alternatives in skyscraper design, Gothic solutions on the one hand and vertically stretched Classicism on the other.”¹³

During this period, the issue of what constituted “modern” design was expounded upon in the press and occupied the thoughts of many architects, who sought an appropriate means of expressing the societal changes brought about by new technology and manufacturing processes. A dichotomy existed, according to Ada Louise Huxtable, between the “modern” architecture of Europe and the “modernistic” new skyscrapers of New York:

‘Modern’ was radical, reductive, and reformist; ‘modernistic’ was richly decorative and attached to conservative and hedonistic values. ‘Modern’ was the austere, abstract, elite, avant-garde work of ... [Walter] Gropius, Mies [van der Rohe], and Le Corbusier, united in its early days under the rubric of the International Style.

‘Modernistic’ was neither pure nor revolutionary; it fused the ornamental and the exotic for what was really the last great decorative style.¹⁴

Only a handful of International Style skyscrapers were constructed in the United States before World War II.¹⁵ Far more popular was the “modernistic” style, which was later termed “Art Deco” based on its debt to the 1925 Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*.¹⁶ Flamboyant, dynamic, and dazzling to the eye, Art Deco’s primary characteristic was its “sumptuous ornament, and the lush textures and colors achieved by combining several materials, such as stone, brick, terra cotta, and metal.”¹⁷ Gilding and shiny materials were frequently used, and favorite decorative motifs, drawn from the natural world and geometric forms, included “spirals, sunflowers, steps, zigzags, triangles, double triangles, hexagons, fragmented circles, and seashells.”¹⁸ Inspirations included the products of the machine age—the gargoyles of the Chrysler Building, based on automotive radiator caps, are one example—as well as ancient and pre-industrial cultures; Art Deco representations of animals, fish, and humans reflected Cubist and folk-art influences. Frequently, facades were given a woven fabric treatment, in buildings including One Wall Street (Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, 1929-31, a designated New York City Landmark) and the 21 West Street Building (Starrett & Van Vleck, 1929-31, a designated New York City Landmark). Wall surfaces read as thin decorative veneers, as “stage sets” to a public infatuated with movies and the theater.¹⁹ Some architects made literal the theatricality of the Art Deco style, including Joseph Urban, whose Ziegfeld Theater (1927, demolished) imitated a stage on its facade, complete with proscenium and raised curtain.²⁰

The Art Deco skyscraper married the style’s exuberant, showy ornament to the tall building forms inspired by the 1916 zoning law and the Chicago Tribune competition. Like the movie palaces of the time, Art Deco skyscrapers had an accessible, comprehensible grandeur and were essentially conservative works; they maintained the conventions of past commercial skyscrapers. Ornament continued to be concentrated at the base and the crown, where brightly colored terra cotta ornament, highly polished stone, lighting effects, gilding, and other features attracted attention from near and afar.

As Art Deco was conquering New York, a new skyscraper form, the slab, emerged. Into the 1920s, the city’s tallest skyscrapers were typically constructed on enormous lots. These sites were big enough, as with the Chrysler Building, to allow for “geometrically pure” square, needle-like towers that broke free of their bases and pierced the sky.²¹ But as large lots became rarer and developers sought to construct tall office buildings on narrow lots, this approach became unfeasible; the square tower, if made too small, lost too much of its internal space to elevators. As a result, new skyscrapers on narrower lots took on a slab-like form, their long and rectangular upper stories seemingly extruded from their bases. The pioneering slab skyscraper was H. Douglas Ives’ and Sloan & Robertson’s 38-story Fred F. French Building (1927, a designated New York City Landmark) at Fifth Avenue and 45th Street, which was constructed on a relatively small lot.²² But the master of the slab at the end of the 1920s was Raymond Hood, whose Daily News Building marked the most radical departure of any tall building from previous skyscraper form. Despite the rich Art Deco bas-relief over its main entrance, Hood’s building, with its artfully planned setbacks and flat, unornamented roofline, came closer to abstract sculpture than any skyscraper before; falling, in style, “between modern and modernistic,” it forsook the decorated crown of the Art Deco skyscraper and approached the purity of the International Style.²³ Hood built upon his experience with the Daily News Building in designing another of the city’s great slab skyscrapers, the RCA Building at Rockefeller Center (a designated New York City Landmark), which was completed in 1933. But with the Depression remaining entrenched and money for office buildings drying up, few Art Deco skyscrapers were completed in New York after Rockefeller Center, and the style, increasingly employed for government and institutional buildings, became considerably more restrained.²⁴

Jesse H. Jones and the Houston Properties Corporation²⁵

The builder of 275 Madison Avenue, Jesse Holman Jones (1874-1956) was a towering figure in Houston, Tex. and Washington, D.C. during the first half of the twentieth century. Houston’s preeminent real estate developer, builder, and banker from the 1910s into the 1950s, Jones ensured the

financial solvency of the Democratic Party in the 1920s, served under President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and Secretary of Commerce, and amassed a fortune of a quarter billion dollars, most of which he left to charity.

Born in rural Tennessee, Jones moved with his family to Dallas as a child and dropped out of school at fourteen to work on his father's tobacco farm. He soon became a clerk in his uncle's lumber business, and was named its general manager at the age of 21. Seven years later, Jones started his own lumber company and began a 50-year campaign of investing in Houston real estate and constructing many of its most prominent buildings. By the mid-1920s, Jones had completed about 30 commercial buildings there, including one for his newspaper, the *Chronicle*, as well as "theaters, department stores, and other mercantile establishments, banks, radio stations, a bus terminal, utilities, warehouses, a laundry, [and] public garages.... [H]is buildings supplied the bulk of office space in Houston," according to Jones biographer Bascom N. Timmins.²⁶

One of Houston's biggest bankers—Jones had founded the Texas Trust Company of Houston in 1909 after personally bailing out two troubled Texas banks the year before—he was asked, in 1921, to become president of a bank that was headquartered in New York City. Jones did not want to live in New York, but he did want to build here, and in 1923, Jones founded the Houston Properties Corporation to handle his New York operations, naming New Jersey native Alfred B. Jones, former head of the Kelly-Springfield Tire Company, as the firm's president.²⁷ To design what appears to have been Houston Properties' first project, the neo-Renaissance-style cooperative apartment house at 1158 Fifth Avenue (1924, within the Carnegie Hill Historic District), the firm hired the architectural partnership of C. Howard Crane and Kenneth Franzheim.²⁸ That Jesse Jones would employ Franzheim repeatedly over his career exemplified Jones' approach, in which he typically hired from a limited pool of skilled personnel whom he called his "business family."²⁹

Other residential projects quickly followed in New York, and in 1926, Houston Properties completed its first major office structure in the city, the Tower Building at 200 Madison Avenue between East 35th and 36th Streets.³⁰ Designed by Warren & Wetmore, the building's nine-story base contained stores and apartments; its signature feature was its blocky sixteen-story office tower, crowned with a lantern, that gave the building its name.³¹ Construction on 275 Madison Avenue began in 1930; this building, the Tower Building, and 10 East 40th Street were products of Jesse Jones' belief in the late 1920s that the Grand Central Zone would continue to be one of the city's top growth areas, based on its convenience to commuters.³² Between 1924 and 1931, Houston Properties invested more than \$25 million in New York City, about two-thirds of this in office buildings and most of the rest in apartment houses.³³

During the Depression, in 1932, Jones was named by President Herbert Hoover to the board of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which was charged with lending money to financial institutions in the hope of averting additional bank failures. Shortly after Roosevelt took office in 1933, he promoted Jones to RFC chairman, and the Corporation's powers were expanded to allow it to make loans to businesses. It was in this position that Jones is said to have loaned \$50 billion of federal money, making him "probably the most powerful financial baron in the nation."³⁴ As the 1940 presidential election approached, Jones, for a time, was considered to be a strong contender for the vice presidential nomination. He continued to administer the RFC even after Roosevelt appointed him Secretary of Commerce, performing both jobs from 1940 to 1945, when he returned to Houston. Jones then built another dozen skyscrapers there; at the time of his death, at 82, Houston had 35 tall buildings, all but two of which had been constructed by Jesse Jones. In his obituary, the *New York Times* remembered him, in addition to his other accomplishments, as the man who "had virtually made Houston's skyline."³⁵

Kenneth Franzheim³⁶

The versatile architect of 275 Madison Avenue, Kenneth Franzheim (1890-1959) was a prominent designer of theaters, department stores, auditoriums, and office buildings. Fluent in a wide range of styles, Franzheim collaborated on lavish, classically inspired movie palaces early in his career before embracing the Art Deco and Moderne styles in the 1920s and the International Style after World War II. He worked extensively for the Houston Properties Corporation, and although he

had offices over the years in Chicago and New York, Franzheim achieved his greatest renown in the city of Houston, where he lived from 1937 until his death. Considered “the foremost commercial architect in the city” during the last two decades of his life, Franzheim designed several of Houston’s most significant postwar buildings, including some of its signature skyscrapers.³⁷ At the time of his death, the *New York Times*, reporting from Houston, credited Franzheim with “helping to remake this city’s skyline.”³⁸

A native of Wheeling, W. Va., Franzheim graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1913 and worked for fellow MIT graduate William Welles Bosworth for the next four years.³⁹ After serving in the United States Army Air Corps, Franzheim married in 1919, and joined the office of architect C. Howard Crane by 1921. Franzheim, who was one of Crane’s two senior associates, was put in charge of his New York office, and by 1923, he was receiving equal billing on the firm’s projects. Crane and Franzheim designed many of the country’s most spectacular theaters, but shortly after the two designed 1158 Fifth Avenue for Houston Properties, Franzheim began working independently of Crane.⁴⁰ In 1928, the same year in which he designed Houston Properties’ building at 40 East 61st Street, Franzheim received a much more prominent commission from Jesse Jones, for the new Houston auditorium to house the 1928 Democratic convention.⁴¹ He continued to work for Houston Properties in New York City in the early 1930s and in 1931, the year in which 275 Madison Avenue was completed, Franzheim collaborated with Roger H. Bullard and Philip L. Goodwin on Houston Properties’ Moderne-style apartment house at First Avenue and East 57th Street, which was cited for excellence by the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.⁴²

In 1937, Franzheim was chosen by Arnold Constable & Company to design a new store—one of the earliest suburban branches of a New York City department store—in New Rochelle, N.Y.⁴³ Ten years later, in collaboration with the famed industrial designer Raymond Loewy, he completed one of downtown Houston’s landmark postwar buildings: the mammoth flagship outlet of Foley’s Department Store.⁴⁴ In between these two projects, Franzheim designed Fairlington, a 3,400-unit, neo-Colonial-style housing development for defense workers begun in 1942 close to the Pentagon in northern Virginia.⁴⁵ Here again, Franzheim’s patron was Jesse Jones; the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which Jones then administered, was the parent agency of the Defense Homes Corporation that constructed Fairlington.⁴⁶

Because of his many important postwar projects in the relatively young city of Houston, Franzheim is considered one of that city’s most important architects, as well as its “ultimate corporate architect.”⁴⁷ In 1952, Franzheim’s Prudential Building opened; the first skyscraper constructed outside of Downtown Houston, it “anticipated the character of much of Houston’s subsequent suburban development.”⁴⁸ In 1956, Franzheim completed the Bank of the Southwest Building, one of Houston’s landmark International Style postwar skyscrapers. Despite Franzheim’s many productive years in Houston, preservationists worry about how little of his work remains there; No. 275 Madison Avenue is among a handful of buildings completed in New York City by this accomplished and innovative architect, who compiled, over the course of his career, an intriguing and unusually diverse body of work.⁴⁹

History of 275 Madison Avenue

Before its acquisition for the construction of the 275 Madison Avenue Building, the site at the southeast corner of Madison Avenue and East 40th Street was of the same exclusive residential character as the rest of Murray Hill. Although it was vacant in the early 1850s, three attached rowhouses—273, 275, and 277 Madison Avenue—each slightly less than 25 feet in width, were built there by 1862; they went on to serve, for decades, as “the homes of many distinguished citizens of New York.”⁵⁰

With the area just to the north developing into one of the city’s great commercial centers, business had infiltrated the row by 1920.⁵¹ In the 1920s, the area below Grand Central was evolving “into the city’s second most important financial center,” and in 1922, the New York Trust Company purchased, and opened an office in, the corner rowhouse at 277 Madison Avenue.⁵² In 1929, New York Trust purchased the lot at 275 Madison, giving it the adjacent parcel to its “uptown branch”; in April of 1930, Jesse Jones was negotiating with the bank and the owner of 273 Madison with the goal

of “assembling ... a site for a tall office building at the southeast corner of Madison Avenue and 40th Street.”⁵³ Within a month, Jones had acquired the entire 74’-by-150’ corner parcel—which included two stable buildings at 24 and 26 East 40th Street constructed before 1910—and created the 277 Madison Avenue Corporation to undertake the building’s financing and construction.⁵⁴ This move followed Jones’ standard practice, as he once explained, of creating new corporations to construct each of his buildings “so that if one building got into trouble, it would not involve any other.”⁵⁵

Plans were soon in place to construct the skyscraper originally marketed as 22 East 40th Street, but called, by the end of the 1930s by its current name, 275 Madison Avenue.⁵⁶ In May of 1930, New York Trust received approval from state banking authorities to move its branch across Madison Avenue until the new building was completed, and in June, Kenneth Franzheim filed plans for the building, which had a projected construction cost of \$1.25 million.⁵⁷ In July of 1930, Houston Properties announced its plans for the new 505-foot structure.⁵⁸ The building’s construction proceeded quickly, with excavation taking about a month, and structural steel completed in about three months, between early September and the middle of December.⁵⁹ Leasing was also underway, with the American Bankers’ Association taking two floors in the new building. New York Trust would occupy almost all of the ground floor and mezzanine—its banking hall (not part of this designation) designed by Walker & Gillette—and the top three floors were leased by Kenneth Franzheim, along with two engineering firms.⁶⁰ Franzheim maintained his office in the building while living at 1158 Fifth Avenue.⁶¹

Perhaps because of the city’s gloomy economic climate, the *Times* repeatedly reported on 275 Madison as its construction progressed. At the end of July, the newspaper published Franzheim’s rendering of the building, and at the end of December, it ran a detailed article on this new “mammoth structure” in the Grand Central district.⁶² The *Times* ran additional short pieces when the American Bankers’ Association and New York Trust Company moved into the completed building in April and June of 1931, but Cross & Brown, the building’s agent, clearly faced a tough market, promoting not only the building’s location in the “Uptown Wall Street district” but also its value.⁶³ In one advertisement, Cross & Brown explained how the skyscraper’s “superior floor arrangements” permitted one tenant to save money by renting a smaller space than it otherwise would have needed, and another advertisement promoted “the finest offices in the district at the price.”⁶⁴

Design of 275 Madison Avenue

Franzheim’s completed building is a distinguished example of Art Deco design. Considered one of the city’s notable skyscrapers of its time, it was described in one contemporary account as being “of novel aspect” and would be photographed in 1936 by Berenice Abbott as part of her famous “Changing New York” series, which chronicled the evolution of the city’s streetscape during the 1930s.⁶⁵ Like many Art Deco skyscrapers, 275 Madison Avenue has a strikingly ornamented base; three stories high with tall rectangular openings, it was treated by Franzheim “as a sort of stage setting ... related to the street.”⁶⁶ With a compelling black-and-silver color scheme similar to those of the Fuller Building (Walker & Gillette, 1928-29, a designated New York City Landmark) and Bloomingdale’s Lexington Avenue building (Starrett & Van Vleck, 1930), the base’s taut, polished granite skin is set off by bright metal door moldings, window frames, and faceted mullions. The motifs within its ground-floor windowsills, the stepped and starburst elements within the spandrels between the ground-floor and mezzanine windows, and the zigzagging molding around the Madison Avenue entrance to the first-floor banking hall reflect Art Deco’s affinity for abstract geometric forms. Unusual abstract ornament in contrasting unpolished granite also fills the space between the third-floor windows, implying a cornice; resembling folded fabric and reminiscent of Urban’s “raised curtain” on the proscenium-like façade of the Ziegfeld Theater, this motif reads as a valance or curtain over the “stage” of the base, particularly over the main, 40th Street entrance. At that entrance, lights concealed by angular shell-like sconces dramatically illuminate the bright metal ornament over the doors.

Rising above the base is 275 Madison Avenue’s dramatically massed slab-form tower, its vertical white-brick stripes likely inspired by Hood’s streamlined Daily News Building, which bridged Art Deco and the emerging International Style when it opened in 1930. As with Daily News—where

Hood sought to conceal the windows to avoid the effect of a wall “shot full of holes”—these stripes alternate with dark window bands, which emphasize the building’s vertical ascent.⁶⁷ The spandrels of 275 Madison are composed of grids of black terra-cotta tiles, and together with the windows, they form unified, mesh-like bands that were particularly visually effective with the building’s original multipane sashes.⁶⁸ Above its base, 275 Madison Avenue is virtually free of ornament, except for simple black geometric motifs on and near its setbacks and crown; the “exclusion of obstructive ornament” around its flush-mounted windows and of “entablatures, architraves, pediments, cornices, and other conventional ornamental devices” reflected the emerging functionalism of the early 1930s and was promoted by Franzheim as making the interiors “virtually shadowless,” although it may also have been a cost-saving measure.⁶⁹ Berenice Abbott likely saw the building’s clean, streamlined form as representative of modern New York City, juxtaposing it, in one photograph, against the fussy iron balconies and ornate ornament of the old Murray Hill Hotel.

Above the twelfth floor, the slab begins to step back from the streetwall. With fewer setbacks on its east façade than the west, the building’s main facade is asymmetrical, although this is barely noticeable from East 40th Street.⁷⁰ Above the setbacks, the slab narrows considerably to a nearly square plan, which is largely a product of the 1916 zoning law and the building’s small site; unlike larger buildings’ square towers with their central service cores, this building’s elevators are grouped at the tower’s south end, making the most economical use, like most slab skyscrapers, of a narrow floor plate.⁷¹ Reflecting the increasing influence of the International Style, 275 Madison originally terminated with a sparsely ornamented, flat crown, marked by little more than austere striped ornament, corbelled piers, and notches at its four corners. (The crown has since been altered, with the construction of a metal-and-glass rooftop penthouse.)

Later History

Despite difficult economic conditions, Cross & Brown succeeded in attracting tenants to the building; in 1933, the Johns-Manville Corporation, then a major producer of asbestos-based building products, leased fourteen floors.⁷² Nevertheless, the Depression rapidly caught up with 275 Madison Avenue. It was clear that the Midtown office market had crashed by November of 1931, when the *Times* reported that three proposed skyscrapers in the Grand Central Zone—including a 65-story office tower planned by Houston Properties on Madison Avenue between 38th and 39th Streets—had recently been canceled.⁷³ By July of 1932, Houston Properties’ building at 10 East 40th Street was in default, as was 275 Madison, which also had substantial unpaid taxes.⁷⁴ In 1933, New York Trust took title to the building, but it remained “in arrears” in the following year.⁷⁵

Better times followed, as in 1943, 275 Madison was purchased by an investment group. In a transaction that was seen as a sign of a reviving Midtown real estate market, American Home Products, which was among the building’s investors, took a long-term lease on most of its top 23 floors and based its headquarters there.⁷⁶ Eight years later, AHP sold the building to Tishman Realty & Construction, but it leased back its space—comprising all of seventeen floors and parts of seven others—from Tishman. At that time, 275 Madison had several major corporate tenants, including Procter & Gamble and Babcock & Wilcox, a large boiler-making concern; New York Trust and Johns-Manville also remained in the building.⁷⁷ In 1961, American Home Products left the building for its own office tower, and its space was leased to other firms.⁷⁸ In 1998, RFR Holdings (now RFR Realty), a subsidiary of RFR Frankfurt of Germany, purchased the building’s 98-year lease, and today, under the continued ownership of RFR, the 275 Madison Avenue Building remains an outstanding example of Art Deco architecture dating from the end of New York’s skyscraper boom of the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁷⁹

Description⁸⁰

No. 275 Madison Avenue is a 43-story skyscraper composed of a three-story, black polished-granite base supporting a 40-story slab-form, setback tower faced in white brick and black terra-cotta tiles. The tower, which has both upper and lower portions, is topped by a non-historic penthouse. With a footprint of approximately 74’-by-150’, the building has two main facades, on Madison Avenue and East 40th Street.⁸¹ Although the building’s base has always had a black-and silver color scheme, the

materials of the base's silver-colored ornament—primarily, its window frames, mullions, door surrounds, and decorative spandrel panels—is difficult to determine because they are painted with silver-colored paint. Examination of one of the first-floor windowsills on the Madison Avenue façade, where paint has flaked off of the surface, indicates that the base's metal ornament may be painted zinc.

Several changes were made to the building beginning in 2004.⁸² This work included the installation of a translucent green-glass panel and supporting metal framework over the main, 40th Street entrance, as well as minor alterations to the storefronts and storefront entrances east of the main entrance. The biggest change on the Madison Avenue façade was the removal of the historic, recessed Madison Avenue building entrance—which contained a wide transom bar crowned by two shell-like sconces that were likely identical to those at the 40th Street entrance—and the incorporation of the entrance recess into the adjacent storefront. Also at that time, the opening just to the north of this entrance was altered, with the removal of half of its decorative sill and the installation of a swinging door for a new automatic teller machine vestibule; pin-mounted stainless steel numerals reading “275” were installed at the northwest corner of the building, on both the Madison and 40th Street facades. A window-replacement campaign begun in 2008 resulted in the replacement of most of the sashes on the building's tower with one-over-one, double-hung sashes.

All elements included below should be considered historic, unless described otherwise.

Base: East 40th Street Façade

This asymmetrical façade contains the building's main entrance. It is eight bays in width, with the main entrance recess at the fifth bay in from Madison Avenue. The main entrance door set, consisting of metal-and-glass revolving and swinging doors, is not original to the building. Above the doors is a black metal transom bar, probably original, containing gold-colored letters, likely non-historic, reading “275 MADISON AVENUE.” This sign band is crowned by a large transom opening containing a window divided into five parts horizontally and four parts vertically. The lowest and highest quarters of the transom contain plain panels, possibly lighted from behind; the third quarter of the transom from the bottom contains five single-pane sashes. The second quarter of the transom from the bottom contains four identical decorative spandrel panels; each of these is fabricated of metal and contains abstract ornament resembling a skyscraper crowned by a starburst. The black “skyscraper” within each of these panels is executed in a contrasting ribbed material, possibly painted metal. Five abstract, angular sconces resembling seashells sit on the transom bar; the four flanking the central seashell contain partially concealed, non-historic light fixtures that project light upward. The transom also has four identical, faceted mullions that curve outward at their bases and extend from the transom's base halfway up its length; two identical pieces flank the window, forming a partial surround. A larger, but similar faceted vertical piece at the center of the window is attached to a curving, prow-like projection and steps back twice near its peak. Metal grilles composed of rectangular geometric elements made up of thin metal members are attached to the lowest and highest quarters of the transom window. Five square, non-historic light fixtures are attached to the soffit of the main-entrance recess.

Flanking the main entrance on each side and attached to the main-entrance reveal is a recessed, rectangular light panel. Each panel is covered with a metal grille composed of rectangular geometric elements made up of thin metal members, with hinges, and a crowning star and keystone. The west reveal (to the right of the main entrance, when viewing it from the sidewalk) has a rectangular door opening containing a metal door (possibly aluminum) with its historic handle. To the right of the door is a non-historic “no smoking” sign; below this sign are metal, individually mounted letters reading “22 EAST FORTIETH.” The east reveal contains a non-historic “no smoking sign,” a non-historic door buzzer panel, and a non-historic “for handicapped service” sign. Non-historic bright, reflective metal covers the corners of the main-entrance recess, where it meets the building's front wall. A non-historic translucent panel composed of two pieces of green glass and metal attachments is installed slightly outward from the front building wall, and covers approximately the top half of the main entrance recess. It is attached to the metal-covered corners of the main-entrance recess with two

non-historic metal rods and eight large non-historic metal brackets. Attached to the front of the glass are non-historic metal numerals reading “275.”

The base of 275 Madison Avenue is essentially flat, except for a slight, sill-like projection that extends the width of the façade. West of the main entrance are four tall openings. Each of these openings contains an identical metal window, each with an angled, non-projecting sill containing raised ornament in a simple geometric pattern; the raised portions of these sills are painted silver, and the recessed portions black. Each of these windows is split into three vertical parts, consisting of a ground-floor portion, a mezzanine portion, and decorative spandrels, identical to the “skyscraper” ornament of the main-entrance transom, separating the two. At the ground floor, the window is tripartite, containing a large central pane flanked by two slightly shorter panes; each of the shorter panes is headed by an almost-square, single-pane sash. The mezzanine portion of each window comprises five single rectangular panes. Projecting, faceted mullions extend from the sills to a point just above the spandrels; shorter but similar faceted projections begin above the central first-floor pane and separate the central three spandrel panels from each other. Although signage for the bank occupying the ground-floor space is visible through the windows, it is set several inches back, except for decals reading “Valley National Bank” that are affixed to the inside of the glass. Two non-historic signs reading “Valley National Bank” are also present at the ground floor west of the main entrance, as is a siamese connection. Above the westernmost window are non-original metal numerals reading “275.”

The spandrel and mezzanine portions of the three windows east of the main entrance are identical to those west of the entrance, except at the central of the three windows, where the central spandrel panel is wider than the others, and of a slightly different design. Other portions of these windows and their openings appear to have been altered, although the extent of this alteration is unclear, as no historic photographs of this portion of the base have been found. The central opening of the three windows contains, at its ground floor, a recessed entrance with polished black granite reveal, paved with non-historic beige ceramic tile and containing two non-historic metal swinging doors with sidelights and single-pane transoms. These doors are separated by a black metal pier; each is set at an angle and serves a different storefront. The soffit of this entrance recess is of black metal, with a non-historic single-tube fluorescent light fixture; the east reveal has an outlet box and lock box, both with conduit. Over the entrance is a non-historic metal box containing a security gate. Between this box and the spandrel panels is a split sash, its eastern half containing a single pane, and its western half containing a metal louver. The metal faceted surround of this window appears to be original to the building, although its sill, just above the security gate box, does not. Two non-historic metal blade signs reading “KODAK” and “food merchants” flank the central opening. An outlet box with conduit is attached to the façade just east of the entrance recess.

Within the easternmost opening, the portion of the window below the spandrel panels is split into two large single-pane sashes, with a non-historic metal bar separating them. Although the original faceted window surround remains, it may have been extended with additional metalwork to a non-historic metal sill. The opening two bays to its west appears to have undergone similar treatment, although the portion of its window just below the spandrel panels is split into two parts by a vertical bar. It is presumed that at least two of the openings east of the main entrance had decorative, angled sills identical to those west of the main entrance. A siamese connection is installed between the main-entrance recess and the third-easternmost opening; also between this opening and the main entrance are the ghosts of pin-mounted letters once identifying 275 Madison Avenue as the Johns-Manville Building.

A band of rectangular window openings—six to the east of the main entrance, and twelve to its west—exists at the third floor. Seventeen of these openings are filled exclusively with one-over-one, double-hung sashes, which appear to be non-historic. The third-floor opening immediately to the east of the main entrance contains a one-over-one, double-hung window and a short metal louver, neither of which is likely historic. Contrasting, light gray abstract geometric ornament in unpolished granite, possibly painted with silver-colored paint, fills the space between these windows and forms a band over the main entrance.⁸³ The East 40th Street façade of the base is crowned by two flagpoles,

which extend at an angle from their attachment points on the top of the base's parapet, and flank the main entrance.

Base: Madison Avenue Façade

The Madison Avenue façade of the base is similar to the East 40th Street façade. Asymmetrical and four bays in width, its second-northernmost bay contains a stepped-back, recessed main entrance to the building's ground-floor banking hall. Among the features of this entrance are a metal revolving door with sidelights, probably non-original; a high, single-pane transom window; and a black transom bar with metal enframing separating the two. These are set within a historic surround comprising a thick metal molding with a zigzag pattern; a transom covered with an apparently non-historic black panel; and an enframing composed of faceted black metal panels within a silver-colored metal frame. The surround is crowned by a historic octagonal clock set within a stepped surround. Above the main-entrance surround is a four-part metal window containing four single-pane sashes.

The openings flanking the entrance are of identical width and contain spandrel panels that are identical to those on the East 40th Street façade. They are narrower, however, containing only three panels and three mezzanine-level sashes. The northernmost opening on the Madison Avenue facade appears to be in original condition, containing a large single-pane sash and retaining its original sill and faceted window surround. A decal advertising Valley National Bank is affixed to the inside of the window, near the sill. The opening immediately south of the banking-hall entrance has been altered, with half of the sill removed and an entrance to an ATM vestibule installed. Above the vestibule entrance and its adjacent single-pane sash, which has a decal advertising Valley National Bank attached to its inside, near the sill, is a large single-pane sash. Although an illuminated box sign is visible through this upper sash, it is set back from the window. The southernmost opening is similar in its upper half to the others; seven spandrel panels in width, it retains its projecting, faceted window surround and one of its faceted mullions, as well as the faceted vertical elements separating each of the spandrel panels. Metal louvers installed above the spandrel panels are likely non-historic. This opening contains additional non-historic infill, including a pair of non-historic glass doors with single-pane sidelights, crowned by a large, frameless, single-pane transom. Although this opening's historic sill only extends across a portion of the opening, this may be the opening's historic condition. South and north of this opening are two non-historic blade signs. Two non-historic signs reading "Valley National Bank" are attached to the façade.

As on the East 40th Street façade, a band of rectangular window openings—eight in all—exist at the third floor. The northernmost and fifth-northernmost of these openings contain paired one-over-one, double-hung windows, and the other openings contain single one-over-one, double-hung windows, all of which appear non-original. Contrasting, light gray abstract geometric ornament in unpolished granite, possibly painted with silver-colored paint, fills the space between these windows.⁸⁴ Above the northernmost window are non-original metal numerals reading "275."

Tower

The three-story base of 275 Madison Avenue is topped by a slab-form tower that brings the building to a height of 43 stories, not including its non-original, two-story penthouse. The building's white vertical stripes are composed of white brick; these alternate with dark window bands that have spandrels composed of grids of black terra-cotta tiles. Its window openings originally contained three-over-three, double-hung sashes; while a few of these remain, most have been replaced by single or paired, one-over-one double-hung windows. Some of the existing window openings contain non-historic metal louvers. The lower portion of the tower—approximately the fourth through 23rd floors—rises in a series of setbacks, different on each façade, to a narrow, nearly square upper tower, which comprises approximately the 24th through 43rd floors. Both the lower and upper towers are sparsely ornamented, except for simple abstract geometric ornament in contrasting white brick and black brick or terra cotta within some of the spandrels and at some lintels. The entire tower has seen few alterations, except for the construction of the penthouse and the replacement of some brick with new white brick, particularly at the corners.

Lower Tower

On the main, East 40th Street façade, the lower portion of the tower is fourteen bays wide at the fourth floor, the first floor above the base. Its openings contain paired one-over-one, double-hung windows. A recessed six-bay-wide central portion is flanked, on each side, by four bays, forming a light well. The central portion proceeds up to the 21st floor, after stepping back at its uppermost four stories to form a two-bay-wide peak. Simple, abstract geometric white-brick ornament decorates the black spandrels of the central portion on its stepped-back floors, and projecting white piers flanked by bands of black brick or terra cotta crown the two uppermost windows. The bays flanking the central portion of the main façade step back above the twelfth floor, and again two floors above. Two bays of windows face into the light well up to the twelfth floor, with one of these bays continuing to the fourteenth floor. The twelfth-floor spandrels and lintels of the flanking bays are decorated with simple black-and-white geometric ornament; black lintel bands are present at the setback floors above.

The Madison Avenue façade is six bays wide at the fourth through twelfth floors. Above the twelfth floor, it steps back in a series of setbacks to the upper tower. Above the first setback, the windows change from paired one-over-one, double-hung sashes to single one-over-one, double-hung sashes. Seven south-facing windows exist on the setbacks, overlooking the adjacent building at 271 Madison Avenue. Ornament on this façade is similar to that of the main façade.

The partially visible east façade is flat, faced in white brick, and virtually free of ornament. It has several window openings containing one-over-one, double-hung sashes. This façade steps back from East 40th Street above the twelfth, fourteenth, seventeenth, and twentieth floors. Above the 23rd floor, the entire façade steps back from the east plane of the building to meet the upper tower.

Upper Tower

The upper portion of the tower of 275 Madison Avenue is much narrower than the lower, slab-like portion of the tower. It is six bays wide on the East 40th Street façade, and five bays wide on the Madison Avenue and east facades. On the Madison Avenue façade, the openings of the two southernmost bays are filled with black panels. The south façade is eight bays wide, with window openings containing non-historic one-over-one, double-hung sashes within its three easternmost bays and an exposed vertical pipe set back from black, horizontal beams within the second-westernmost bay. The westernmost and third-, fourth-, and fifth-westernmost bays are composed of black vertical stripes. Some brick on the lower portion of the south façade of the upper tower is discolored, possibly by exhaust from the adjacent building to the south. All facades of the upper tower feature limited, abstract geometric ornament in white brick and contrasting black brick or terra cotta similar to that of the lower tower.

The upper tower originally rose to a symmetrical flat crown marked by notched corners and a parapet ornamented with black-and-white, chevron-like decoration and simple corbelled, projecting white brick piers. The roof has been altered with the construction of a two-story penthouse, which is primarily visible over the east and south façades. This glass-and-steel addition, featuring ribbon windows and chamfered corners, is topped by two levels of rooftop terraces with metal pipe railings. A vertical exhaust pipe is also visible over the east façade. Changes visible to the roof over the south façade include the removal of the tower's southwest notch with the installation of a two-story-high white-brick addition, and the removal of ornament over the three window openings at the top of the south façade. Portions of the glass-and-steel addition are also visible over the easternmost portion of the south façade.

Report researched and written by
Michael D. Caratzas
Research Department

NOTES

¹ Portions of this section are adapted from the introductory essay, prepared by Gale Harris, to LPC, *Murray Hill Historic District Designation Report* (LP-2102) (New York: City of New York, 2002), 7-24; and LPC, *The Allerton 39th Street House Designation Report* (LP-2296) (New York: City of New York, 2008), prepared by Theresa C. Noonan. Other sources for this section include Joyce Gold, "Murray Hill (i)," in Kenneth T. Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 783.

² The Murrays were dedicated to many humanitarian causes; upon his death, Robert left a significant sum of money to promote the manumission of slaves, and to support a free school for black children, according to *The Allerton 39th Street House Designation Report*.

³ "New Grand Central Station and Stern's Store Important Factors in 42d Street's Development," *New York Times* (May 12, 1912), XX1.

⁴ "Tall Building on Madison Avenue Corner Will Replace Hyde House at 40th Street," *New York Times* (April 8, 1917), RE1; "\$300,000,000 Estimated as the Aggregate Cost of the Present and Future Development of the Grand Central Terminal Zone," *New York Times* (March 20, 1921), S5.

⁵ "Midtown Zone is Big Business Area," *New York Times* (January 6, 1929), 201.

⁶ William J. Demorest, "Millions of Feet of Office Space Added to Grand Central Zone," *New York Times* (January 20, 1929), RE1. The buildings nearing completion for 1930 occupancy included the 68-story Chrysler Building (William Van Alen, a designated New York City Landmark), the 35-story Daily News building (Raymond M. Hood, a designated New York City Landmark), and the 53-story Lincoln Building (J.E.R. Carpenter), facing Vanderbilt Avenue across from Grand Central Terminal.

⁷ The building at 100 Park Avenue, extending from 40th to 41st Streets and completed in 1949, was "the first major office building constructed in the Grand Central District since the early 30s," according to Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 137.

⁸ Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *2 Park Avenue Building Designation Report* (LP-2186) (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Virginia Kurshan. Other sources include David Gebhard, *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996), 1-15; Paul Goldberger, *The Skyscraper* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 9-101; Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered: The Search for a Skyscraper Style* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 4-49; Cervin Robinson, "Buildings and Architects," in *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 3-33; Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Art Deco Style," in *Skyscraper Style*, 34-81; and *Form Follows Finance*, 67-107.

⁹ "Buildings and Architects," 12.

¹⁰ *The Skyscraper*, 61.

¹¹ *The Skyscraper*, 58.

¹² *Form Follows Finance*, 77-79.

¹³ "Buildings and Architects," 8.

¹⁴ *The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered*, 39-44.

¹⁵ Among these were the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society Building in Philadelphia (Howe & Lescaze, 1930-31), and the McGraw-Hill Building in New York (Hood, Godley, & Fouilhoux, 1931).

¹⁶ The name Art Deco was coined by the British historian Bevis Hillier in the 1960s.

¹⁷ "The Art Deco Style," 37.

¹⁸ *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America*, 7.

¹⁹ *The Skyscraper*, ix.

²⁰ On the Ziegfeld, see Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1987), 235-40; and Nicholas van Hoogstraten, *Lost Broadway Theatres* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1991), 226-31.

²¹ *New York 1930*, 595.

²² According to *New York 1930*, 597, “The Fred F. French Building ... demonstrated that a slab could retain the iconic clarity of the skyscraper type and provide more rentable space per square foot of ground area, and that with elevators and services grouped at one end of a central spinelike corridor, its floors were more easily adapted for either a single tenant or subdivision into individual offices.” The Chanin Building is another prominent slab skyscraper from the late 1920s.

²³ *The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered*, 44.

²⁴ *Skyscraper Style*, 83-88 contains a selected list of Art Deco buildings constructed in New York City. As is evident from this list, construction of Art Deco buildings dropped sharply in the early 1930s; although the style persisted through the end of the decade, it became increasingly austere, as shown in works such as the Tiffany and Criminal Courts buildings (Cross & Cross and Harvey Wiley Corbett, respectively, both 1939).

²⁵ Sources for this section include Bascom N. Timmins, *Jesse H. Jones: The Man and the Statesman* (New York: Holt, 1956); John A. Garraty, Ed., *Dictionary of American Biography: Supplement Six* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1980), 324-26; John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, Eds., *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209-11; Robert Sobel, Ed., *Biographical Dictionary of the United States Executive Branch, 1774-1971* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), 190-91; and *Encyclopedia of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 658.

²⁶ *Jesse H. Jones*, 83-84.

²⁷ Houston Properties’ incorporation was listed in “New Incorporations,” *New York Times* (December 30, 1923), 21. Biographical information about Alfred B. Jones appears in “Three Named to Build East River Tunnel,” *New York Times* (June 23, 1935), 1; and “Alfred Jones, Ex-City Aide, Dies,” *New York Times* (October 16, 1965), 27.

²⁸ This collaboration between Houston Properties and Crane and Franzheim’s firm probably marked Houston Properties’ earliest involvement with Franzheim, who may have been related to Jesse Jones by marriage. On 1158 Fifth Avenue, see LPC, *Expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1834) (New York: City of New York, 1993); “New Cooperative Apartments: 1158 Fifth Ave.” (Advertisement), *New York Times* (March 16, 1924), RE9; and “New Cooperative Apartments: 1158 Fifth Ave.” (Advertisement), *New York Times* (April 6, 1924), RE9. The article “Tishmans Acquire Midtown Offices,” *New York Times* (November 23, 1951), 45 states that Franzheim was Jesse Jones’ brother-in-law, although Franzheim’s wife, Elizabeth Frances Simms, does not appear to have been Jones’ sister, and Jones’ wife, nee Anne Holman, does not appear to have been Franzheim’s sister. According to a separate account, “Through the intervention of his father-in-law, Franzheim was commissioned by Jesse H. Jones to collaborate ... on the design of ... the Gulf Building” in Houston. This seems suspect, however, as Franzheim had already worked for Jones on several projects before construction began on the Gulf Building (Alfred C. Finn, J.E.R. Carpenter, and Kenneth Franzheim, 1927-29). See “An Architectural History of the Museum, 1924-1953,” *Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Bulletin* (Winter-Spring 1991), 52.

²⁹ *Jesse H. Jones*, 119.

³⁰ In 1925, Houston Properties completed Mayfair House at 610 Park Avenue, a fifteen-story, neo-Gothic/neo-Renaissance-style residential building designed by J.E.R. Carpenter, one of New York’s foremost apartment-house architects of the day. Over the next two years, Carpenter would also design 950 Fifth Avenue (1926) and 812 Park Avenue (1927), both fourteen-story neo-Renaissance-style apartment houses, for Houston Properties. All three buildings are within the Upper East Side Historic District. See LPC, *Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1051) (New York: City of New York,

1981), 961, 1083, 1127. See also “Texan in New York,” *New York Times* (June 27, 1926), RE1; “Lady White-Todd Buys Suite,” *New York Times* (May 13, 1926), 43; and “A New Cooperative for Park Avenue Site,” *New York Times* (February 13, 1927), RE1.

³¹ On the Tower Building, see Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker, *The Architecture of Warren & Wetmore* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 188-91.

³² “Sees Realty Advancing: Jesse H. Jones Thinks City Will Build All Over Again Soon,” *New York Times* (April 14, 1929), 178.

³³ “Grand Central Zone Good Rental Centre,” *New York Times* (January 18, 1931), 156.

³⁴ John A. Garraty and Jerome L. Sternstein, *Encyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 597.

³⁵ “Jesse H. Jones Dies; R.F.C. Head, ’33-’45,” *New York Times* (June 2, 1956), 1.

³⁶ Sources for this section include Stephen Fox, “Franzheim, Kenneth,” *The Handbook of Texas Online* (Texas Historical Association: www.tshaonline.org), accessed October 21, 2008; and “Franzheim Dead; Architect Was 68,” *New York Times* (March 18, 1959), 37. Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *ANTA Theater Designation Report* (LP-1309) (New York: City of New York, 1985), 8-10.

³⁷ “Franzheim, Kenneth.”

³⁸ “Franzheim Dead; Architect Was 68.”

³⁹ For more on Bosworth, see LPC, *American Telephone & Telegraph Company Building Designation Report* (LP-2194) (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Gale Harris.

⁴⁰ These theaters included the Selwyn and Harris “twin theaters” (1923) in Chicago, which drew upon English Renaissance and Florentine architecture; the Earle (later Warner) Theater (1924) in Washington, D.C., its lobby inspired by the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles; and the Capitol Theater and Office Building (1926, with Blackall, Clapp & Whittemore and George Nelson Meserve) in Boston. Crane and Franzheim’s New York theaters included the Guild Theater (later ANTA Theater and Virginia Theater, now the August Wilson Theater, a designated New York City Landmark), completed in 1924; and Brooklyn’s enormous Fox Theater (1928, demolished 1970-71), an exotic 4,300-seat Art Deco showplace decorated with East Indian and Baroque-style ornament. On the Selwyn and Harris Theaters, see Rexford Newcomb, “The New Harris-Selwyn ‘Twin’ Theatres in Chicago,” *Western Architect* (January 1923), 9-10, plates 8-15; and “Two Recent Chicago Playhouses: The Twin Selwyn and Harris Theaters,” *Architectural Forum* (January 1923), 13-16, plates 7-10. On the Warner Theater, see Allen Freeman, “Theatrical Comeback,” *Historic Preservation* (January/February 1993), 20-23; and Patricia Raicht, “A New Stage in the Life of the Warner,” *Theatre Classics*, 1992, 14-16. On the Capitol Theater and Office Building, see *American Architect* (August 5, 1926), plates 181-182. On the Fox Theater, see “Operator in Fox Deal,” *New York Times* (April 30, 1926), 32; and the Historic American Buildings Survey report for the Fox Theater (1971-80), completed by A. Craig Morrison, Lucy Pope Wheeler, and Denys Peter Myers, and accessible at the Library of Congress’ “American Memory” website (<http://memory.loc.gov/>).

⁴¹ On the building at 40 East 61st Street, see “Woman Hospital Operator Leases Nine Floors of Building,” *New York Times* (April 14, 1928), 35. Regarding the Houston auditorium, Jones had envisioned a temporary structure for the event, and Franzheim, working with other architects and engineer W. Klingenberg, oversaw the erection, in just 64 days, of a \$200,000 wood structure covering two city blocks and housing a 25,000-seat auditorium, offices, and four dining rooms. Its three large roofs were among the nation’s pioneering examples of lamella construction—in which relatively short mass-produced members are rapidly assembled into a lattice-like grid—but the building, described by Franzheim at the time of its completion as “the largest auditorium ever built in the South and one of the largest ever built in the United States,” stood only until 1936. See “Big Houston Arena Ready for June 26,” *New York Times* (June 10, 1928), 27; Carl W. Condit, *American Building Art: The Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 39-41; and Drexel Turner, “Beamers: The Houston Conventions, 1928 and 1992,” *Cite* (Fall 1992-Winter 1993), 15-17.

⁴² “Good Rental Season Indicated for New Apartments,” *New York Times* (April 5, 1931), 145; “Sutton Place House Closes 100 Leases,” *New York Times* (August 23, 1931), RE1; “Property Owners Centre Interest on Tax Problems,” *New York Times* (August 30, 1931), RE1; and “Merit in Good Design,” *New York Times* (March 27, 1932), RE2.

⁴³ “Store Names Architect: Franzheim Plans Arnold Constable Building in New Rochelle,” *New York Times* (May 25, 1937), 51; “Arnold Constable Files Store Plans,” *New York Times* (July 8, 1937), 42; and Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 1063. The New Rochelle store appears to have been demolished. For additional information and a picture of the building, see Frank E. Sanchis, *American Architecture, Westchester County, New York: Colonial to Contemporary* (Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y.: North River Press, 1977), 344-46.

⁴⁴ Bruce C. Webb, “The Incredible Shrinking Store: Foley’s Department Store, Downtown Houston,” *Cite* (Fall 1989), 10-11.

⁴⁵ Orville S. McPherson, “A Large Scale Community Development: Fairlington, Its ‘Ins’ and ‘Outs,’” *Housing Progress* (Spring 1945), 34-39. Begun in 1942 to house defense workers, the neo-Colonial-style development was praised in 2000 as an “oasis” by Reed Karaim in “How to Make a Village,” *Preservation* (November/December 2000), 22.

⁴⁶ “A Large Scale Community Development: Fairlington, Its ‘Ins’ and ‘Outs’” describes the project as “a Reconstruction Finance Corporation ‘war baby.’”

⁴⁷ Barry Moore, “Endangered City: Franzheim Alert!,” *Cite* (Spring 2002), 13. Franzheim’s Art Deco Empire Room (1938; demolished 1957) in Houston’s Rice Hotel, completed shortly after his move to Houston, brought “high New York style to the Bayou City,” according to Moore. In 1949, Franzheim was named a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, and served as general chairman of its convention, which met in Houston that year with the theme of “American architecture in the Atomic Age.” See “Architects Will Study Building Problems of Atomic Age at Convention in Houston,” *New York Times* (February 20, 1949), R1; “One Thousand Architects Going to Houston,” *New York Times* (March 13, 1949), R4; and “Architects Elect Walker New Head,” *New York Times* (March 18, 1949), 45.

⁴⁸ Vincent P. Hauser, “Design, Industry, and Architecture: Houston at Mid-Century,” *Cite* (Winter 1997-1998), 40.

⁴⁹ Barry Moore, referring to Houston in “Endangered City: Franzheim Alert!” lamented “how little of Franzheim’s work we have left.”

⁵⁰ Matthew Dripps, *Map of the City of New York Extending Northward to Fiftieth Street* (New York: M. Dripps, 1852); William Perris, *Maps of the City of New-York* (New York: Perris & Browne, 1857-62); and “Gen. Porter’s Home in Wreckers’ Hands,” *New York Times* (July 6, 1930), 121. Among the residents of 273 Madison, the southernmost of the three, was Dr. Morris Loeb, a noted chemistry professor at Columbia University who left much of his multimillion-dollar estate to Harvard University to fund research in physics and chemistry. John T. Terry, a “well-known banker and businessman,” lived at No. 275, and the row’s most prominent resident, in the corner building at No. 277, was General Horace Porter (1837-1921), who was remembered upon his death as “one of the picturesque figures of American life.” Present at Appomattox with General Ulysses S. Grant at the time of Lee’s surrender, Porter headed the effort to build Grant’s Tomb in New York City, and was famed as “an after-dinner orator and raconteur.” See also “Dr. Morris Loeb Left \$2,148,042,” *New York Times* (July 29, 1914), 9; and “Gen. Horace Porter, Long in Coma, Dies,” *New York Times* (May 30, 1921), 9.

⁵¹ In that year, 273 Madison was home to the Rosenbach Company, one of the country’s premier dealers of antique books, which was reported to have purchased a 1,500-volume collection of eighteenth-century books “said to be the finest library ever brought to America.” See “Famous Schuhmann Library to Be Sold,” *New York Times* (May 9, 1920), E6.

⁵² “Tishmans Acquire Midtown Offices.” New York Trust was one of the country’s largest banks at the end of the 1920s; it merged with the Chemical Corn Exchange Bank in 1959. Chemical Corn Exchange, which

later simplified its name to Chemical Bank, merged with Chase Manhattan Bank in 1995. See “30 of Biggest Banks Here,” *New York Times* (January 23, 1929), 37; “Chemical Corn Exchange Bank and New York Trust Set Merger,” *New York Times* (June 3, 1959), 1; “Chemical New York Corporation” (Advertisement), *New York Times* (February 19, 1969), 60; and “Chase and Chemical Agree to Merge in \$10 Billion Deal Creating Largest U.S. Bank,” *New York Times* (August 29, 1995), A1.

⁵³ “Deals on East Side Involve \$2,000,000,” *New York Times* (July 18, 1929), 43; “Assembling Office Site,” *New York Times* (April 19, 1930), 34.

⁵⁴ The stables appear on George W. and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Company, 1899), updated to 1909; “New Incorporations,” *New York Times* (May 13, 1930), 42.

⁵⁵ *Jesse H. Jones*, 115.

⁵⁶ “Publisher Leases Skyscraper Space,” *New York Times* (May 26, 1939), 45 refers to the building, which had generally been called 22 East 40th Street during its construction and early years, as 275 Madison Avenue. It would continue to be called 22 East 40th Street occasionally over the coming years; see, for example, “Buys Skyscraper at 22 E. 40th St.,” *New York Times* (March 25, 1943), 35.

⁵⁷ “Authorize Changes Among State Banks,” *New York Times* (May 25, 1930), 46; “\$3.2 Million Loan is Placed,” *New York Times* (June 19, 1930), 51; “Recorded Mortgages,” *New York Times* (June 21, 1930), 31; “Recorded Mortgages,” *New York Times* (June 25, 1930), 49; “Manhattan Plans Filed,” *New York Times* (June 27, 1930), 42. See also “Bank in Madison Av. Lease,” *New York Times* (June 21, 1930), 32.

⁵⁸ “Madison Av. Offices to Rise 505 Feet,” *New York Times* (July 14, 1930), 39. At the same time, the *Times* lamented the loss of the “three fine residences” that were being pulled down for the skyscraper, observing that only one former residence remained of the “famous home block” on the east side of Madison Avenue between 39th and 40th Streets. See “Gen. Porter’s Home in Wreckers’ Hands.”

⁵⁹ “New Skyscraper in Central Zone,” *New York Times* (December 21, 1930), 141.

⁶⁰ “Bank in Madison Av. Lease: New York Trust Rents Space in Proposed Building,” *New York Times* (June 21, 1930), 32; “Bankers Association Leases Quarters,” *New York Times* (November 17, 1930), 35; “Bankers Association to Move,” *New York Times* (November 18, 1930), 50; “American Bankers’ Association” (Advertisement), *New York Times* (November 18, 1930), 52; “Bank Gets New Home: Madison Avenue Offices for New York Trust Company,” *New York Times* (March 8, 1931), 153.

⁶¹ *City Directories of the United States, 1902-1935, New York, N.Y.* (Reel 27: 1933-34, part 2), in the collections of the New York Public Library.

⁶² “Low Realty Prices in Tiemann’s Day,” *New York Times* (July 20, 1930), RE1; “New Skyscraper in Central Zone.” Shortly after the December 21 article, the *Times* published a notice explaining that 275 Madison would have “more than 30 private terraces, putting it among the structures with the largest number of balconies in the city.” In January of 1931, the paper published an article consisting primarily of quotes from Alfred B. Jones promoting 275 Madison Avenue and other Houston Properties projects, and expressing his belief that “the situation in New York City is soundly satisfactory and full of promise for the early future.” See “Real Estate Notes,” *New York Times* (December 30, 1930), 40; and “Grand Central Zone Good Rental Centre.”

⁶³ “Bankers in New Home,” *New York Times* (April 19, 1931), 50; “New Banking Quarters,” *New York Times* (June 7, 1931), RE7.

⁶⁴ “2,200 Square Feet Saved” (Advertisement), *New York Times* (February 24, 1931), 38; “22 East 40th” (Advertisement), *New York Times* (April 2, 1931), 49.

⁶⁵ “Real Estate Notes,” *Wall Street Journal* (July 26, 1930), 9. Three photographs of the building by Abbott are collected in Chapter Six of Bonnie Yochelson, *Berenice Abbott: Changing New York* (New York: The New Press, 1997). It is among only a handful of notable slab skyscrapers of its era highlighted by Stern, Gilmartin, and Mellins in *New York 1930* (599).

⁶⁶ *Skyscraper Style*, plate 63 caption.

⁶⁷ “Buildings and Architects,” 26.

⁶⁸ The original three-over-three configuration of these sashes is clearly visible in Abbott’s photographs.

⁶⁹ “New Skyscraper in Central Zone.”

⁷⁰ Pyramidal setbacks on the main façade may have been derived from the Chanin Building, according to *New York 1930* (page 599), although Franzheim used a similar technique for his 1928 medical-office building at 40 East 61st Street.

⁷¹ The lot upon which 275 Madison Avenue is built measures 12,350 square feet, as compared with 29,635 square feet for the Chanin Building’s lot, 37,325 square feet for the Chrysler Building’s lot, and 91,351 square feet for the Empire State Building’s lot. These figures come from the New York City Open Accessible Space Information System (www.nycoasis.net).

⁷² Among those leasing space in the early 1930s were legal and engineering firms; a real estate broker; a publicist; cement, flooring, and dress-making companies; publishers; trade groups, including the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, the Radio Manufacturers’ Association, and the Men’s Neckwear Association; the American Safety Razor Company; and Count Folke Bernadotte, nephew of the King of Sweden. See “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (February 20, 1931), 43; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (February 25, 1931), 51; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (April 11, 1931), 38; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (May 24, 1931), N10; “Bedaux Company Rents New Offices,” *New York Times* (March 25, 1931), 49; “Home Near 5th Av. Sold for \$400,000,” *New York Times* (April 21, 1931), 53; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (September 18, 1931), 41; “Pease Moves to East 40th St.,” *New York Times* (May 10, 1931), N8; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (March 5, 1931), 50; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (April 15, 1931), 53; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (April 16, 1931), 51; “New Incorporations,” *New York Times* (May 6, 1931), 47; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (September 1, 1931), 42; “Airplane Makers Defend Code Today,” *New York Times* (December 20, 1933), 3; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (April 17, 1932), N6; “Neckwear Men Seek Rise,” *New York Times* (June 28, 1933), 30; “Business Leases,” *New York Times* (April 14, 1932), 39; and “Books and Authors,” *New York Times* (July 30, 1933), 62. On Johns-Manville’s lease, see “Had Good Realty Year,” *New York Times* (January 7, 1934), RE2.

⁷³ “More Vacant Land in Central Zone,” *New York Times* (November 22, 1931), 33. See also “Drop Plan to Build 65-Story Offices,” *New York Times* (August 8, 1931), 25; and “Choice Plot in Murray Hill Centre has had Troubled Financial Career,” *New York Times* (July 22, 1934), RE1.

⁷⁴ “Receiver Appointed for 44-Story Offices,” *New York Times* (July 23, 1932), 23.

⁷⁵ “Buys Skyscraper at 22 E. 40th St.,” *New York Times* (March 25, 1943), 35; “Mortgage Plan for \$3,200,000 Set,” *New York Times* (April 14, 1934), 30; “Large Loan Extended,” *New York Times* (May 1, 1934), 40.

⁷⁶ “Buys Skyscraper at 22 E. 40th,” “Trading Revives in Midtown Zone on the East Side,” *New York Times* (April 4, 1943), RE1.

⁷⁷ “Tishmans Acquire Midtown Offices.”

⁷⁸ “For an Old Skyscraper, Life Can Begin at 40,” *New York Times* (July 14, 1968), R1. In the 1940s, the land beneath 275 Madison, and a long-term lease on the building itself, had been sold to separate companies; the Goldman-DiLorenzo firm purchased the land in the 1960s, and the lease in 1973, but the building was soon in financial trouble. By 1976, it had returned to financial health, before changing hands again in 1980. See “About Real Estate: From Collapse to a Comeback,” *New York Times* (April 14, 1976), 79; and “Realty News,” *New York Times* (July 13, 1980), R8.

⁷⁹ “Metro Business,” *New York Times* (April 3, 1998), B10.

⁸⁰ Sources for historic photographs of the building include Kenneth Franzheim, *Kenneth Franzheim, Architect, New York City* (New York: Architectural Catalog Company); *Berenice Abbott: Changing New York*; and *Skyscraper Style*, plate 63.

⁸¹ The exact dimensions of the lot are 74.08' -by-150', according to www.nycoasis.net.

⁸² Drawings relevant to these changes are contained in the LPC research file.

⁸³ According to terra-cotta expert Susan Tunick, who visited 275 Madison Avenue in April of 2008, “with binoculars one can see the brush strokes of silver paint which is on the textured surface that is incised into the black stone” (personal correspondence between Ms. Tunick and author, April 17, 2008).

⁸⁴ See previous footnote.

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 275 Madison Avenue 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 275 Madison Avenue Building is an outstanding Art Deco skyscraper dating from the end of New York's 1920s and early-1930s skyscraper boom; that it is among a handful of buildings completed in New York City by architect Kenneth Franzheim, a prominent designer of theaters, department stores, apartment houses, and office buildings; that it has a striking polished-granite base with rich abstract ornament and a compelling black-and-silver color scheme; that it features a dramatically massed, slab-form tower; that its Art Deco ornament and streamlined, austere tower bridge the exuberant Art Deco style and the spare, sculptural qualities of the International Style; that it was developed by Houston Properties, which was founded by Jesse H. Jones, a prominent Houston, Texas-based real estate developer who achieved national recognition as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Secretary of Commerce and Chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation; and that it was photographed by famed photographer Berenice Abbott as part of her famed "Changing New York" series, which chronicled the evolution of the city's streetscape during the 1930s.

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 275 Madison Avenue Building, originally 22 East 40th Street Building (aka 273-277 Madison Avenue; 22-26 East 40th Street), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 869, Lot 54 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair
Diana Chapin, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter,
Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



275 Madison Avenue
Photo: Carl Forster, 2007



275 Madison Avenue
East 40th Street façade
Photo: Carl Forster, 2007



275 Madison Avenue
Madison Avenue façade
Photo: Carl Forster, 2007



275 Madison Avenue
East 40th Street façade of tower
Photo: Michael Caratzas, 2008



275 Madison Avenue
Madison Avenue façade of lower tower
Photo: Michael Caratzas, 2008



275 Madison Avenue
Madison Avenue and south facades of upper tower
Photo: Michael Caratzas: 2008

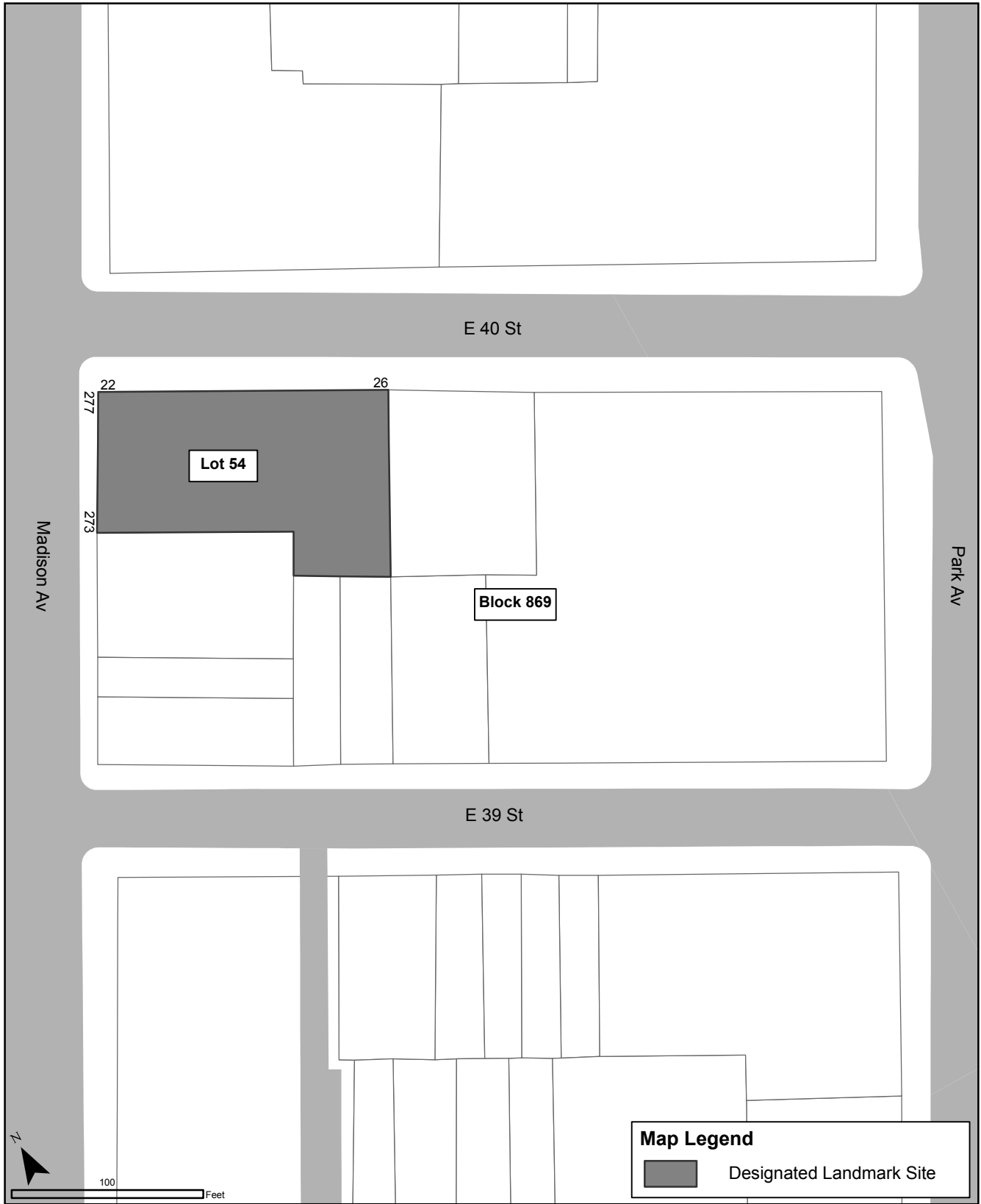


275 Madison Avenue
South façade of upper tower
Photo: Michael Caratzas, 2008



275 Madison Avenue
East façade

Photo: Michael Caratzas, 2008



275 MADISON AVENUE BUILDING, ORIGINALLY 22 EAST 40TH STREET BUILDING (LP-2286), 275 Madison Avenue (aka 273-277 Madison Avenue; 22-26 East 40th Street). Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 869, Lot 54.

Designated: January 13, 2009

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.