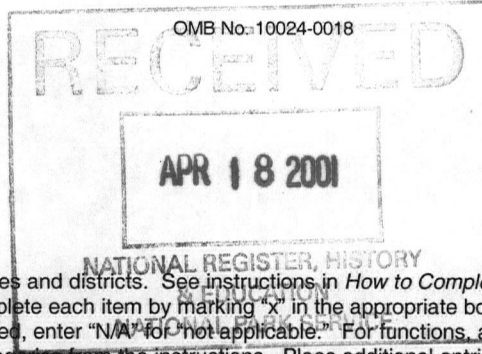


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

556



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Germania Life Insurance Company Building

other names/site number Guardian Life Insurance Company Building; W New York – Union Square

2. Location

street & number 50 Union Square East (aka 201 Park Avenue South) [] not for publication

city or town New York [] vicinity

state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10003

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [] statewide [X] locally. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Meredith Carter, SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/31/01
Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
- [] see continuation sheet
- [] determined eligible for the National Register
- [] see continuation sheet
- [] determined not eligible for the National Register
- [] removed from the National Register
- [] other (explain) _____

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

5/25/01
date of action

Germania Life Insurance Company Building

New York County, New York

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

0

TOTAL

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/business/office building

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/hotel

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals: Beaux Arts

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation steel and concrete

walls granite, brick

roof tile

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1

Germania Life Insurance Company Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

7. Narrative Description

The Germania Life Insurance Company Building (1910-11), later known as the Guardian Life Insurance Company Building, and now known as the W New York - Union Square, is located on the northeast corner of Park Avenue South and East 17th Street, on a lot that measures 80 feet along Park Avenue South and 115 feet along East 17th Street, at the northeastern corner of Union Square, in New York City, New York County, New York. The building is located in a heavily built up area, in a transitional zone between a district of office buildings and lofts, located to the north and west, and the Gramercy Park residential neighborhood to the east (Gramercy Park Historic District, NR listed 1-23-90). The building is located diagonally across the street from Union Square (NHL 12-9-97), a small park between East 14th and East 17th streets. Immediately to the north of the Germania Life Insurance Company Building is a small, five-story, early twentieth-century commercial structure. North of that is a twenty story building. Elsewhere along Park Avenue South, to the north and the northwest, are many other office and loft buildings of between twelve and twenty stories. Immediately to the east of the building is a four-story International style structure that was erected in 1961 as an addition to Guardian Life's building; this now functions as a separate building under separate ownership. Farther east are a five-story altered rowhouse and a one-story carriage house. To the south, across East 17th Street, is the former Tammany Hall, now the Union Square Theater and the New York Film Academy. Elsewhere along the south side of East 17th Street are a number of mid-nineteenth-century rowhouses and two late-nineteenth-century apartment buildings, all of which are within the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission's East 17th Street/Irving Place Historic District. The first two stories of the Germania Life Insurance Company Building occupies its entire site. Above the second story the building is U-shaped and has a light court facing north. The building retains its integrity to a very high degree and has been designated as an individual landmark by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The Germania Life Insurance Company Building is a twenty-one-story structure faced entirely in gray Concord granite, with the exception of a low red polished Numidian granite watertable and the four-story mansard roof which is clad in red Spanish tile with copper detailing. The first story, on both Park Avenue South and East 17th Street, has heavy rustication with large beveled blocks and deep channels. The street level is pierced by wide segmental-arch openings, each with a large keystone. On Park Avenue South, the facade is articulated by three arches and on East 17th Street by five arches. On Park Avenue South, the central arch is somewhat wider than the flanking arches. The arch to the north is the main entrance to the building; it has an awning installed in 2000. All of the original doors and windows on the first story were altered at some point after the building was completed. The present storefronts, designed in keeping with the historic character of the building, were installed in 2000 as part of the conversion of the building into a hotel. The keystones of the ground-floor openings support a beltcourse with a dentil band and stylized fish heads; this beltcourse separates the first and second stories.

The second and third stories on both street facades are faced with rusticated stone. The blocks are beveled, but the channels between the blocks are shallower than those on the first story. In the center of the Park Avenue South facade is a two-story tall, round-arch opening capped by a keystone, with windows divided by vertical and rectangular iron bands. On the third-story is a projecting iron balcony with the initials GL in the

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 2

Germania Life Insurance Company Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

center. This central arch is flanked on each floor by a single rectangular window. Between the second and third stories is a garland panel. At either end are a pair of rectangular windows. These rectangular windows, like the other rectangular windows in the building have one-over-one sash; one-over-one is the original pattern, but the present sash are replacements. The second story windows are capped by blind round arches, each with a carved shell. The second-story windows also have heavy keystones that support the sills of the third-story windows. On East 17th Street, the second and third stories focus on three centrally-placed two-story round-arch openings with original iron mullions that divide the openings into a large central rectangular pane (non-original) flanked by four-light sidelights (original). Above the large rectangular pane is an arched pane and four outer panes. To the east and west are pairs of rectangular windows, with the second-story windows capped by the same shell motif and keystone seen on the front facade. A denticulated cornice runs above the third story. A long balcony extends across each facade above the denticulated cornice. The balconies are supported by the keystones and by paired and single brackets. The balcony railings are composed of balusters, vertical rectangular panels, and square panels with rosettes.

On the fourth through the seventeenth story, along the Park Avenue South facade, the rectangular window openings are arranged in a pattern of two-three-two. The fourth through the fifteenth stories are faced with shallow beltcourses and elongated quoins. The crisply-cut paired window openings to either end have no ornamental articulation. Each triplet has a projecting sill resting on small brackets. On East 17th Street the window openings on the fourth through seventeenth stories are grouped in five pairs. The three central pairs have sills with modest brackets. Above the fifteenth story is a projecting cornice ornamented with banded foliage. Panels with carved shields and torches separate the groups of windows on both facades. The individual windows within each group are separated by foliate panels. A large cornice once ran above the sixteenth story, but this was removed circa 1940 and replaced by a flat sheet-metal fascia. The seventeenth story is faced in smooth stone and is unornamented. Above this level is a bracketed cornice that supports the building's four-story mansard.

The four-story steeply sloping mansard is clad in Spanish tile and has copper edging and crown molding. The edges are marked by an ornate banding. At the top of the mansard is a parapet with recessed blind arches, corner cartouches, and raised torches that read as acroteria. On the Park Avenue South frontage, the lower level of the mansard has windows divided into two pairs flanking a central triplet. Each group has a stone enframingent. Above each window is a carved shell, similar to those seen above the second-story windows, and each group is capped by a cornice. On the second-story of the mansard, single windows with segmental-arch pediments flank a triplet. In the center of the third level is a triplet capped by a pediment with a cartouche in its tympanum. The end windows of the triplet are narrower than the central window. To each side are two windows, all of which are capped by pediments. The pediment of the central window on the third level projects into the fourth level and is flanked on each side by two round-arch windows with keystones. On East 17th Street, the first level consists of three central triplets with narrower side windows and end pairs. Each window of the pairs and the central window of the triplets is capped by a carved shell motif. On the second level are three central triplets with segmental-arch pediments and narrow side windows. At each end is a single window with a segmental-arch pediment. On the third level are ten windows with pediments. The two windows at either end are spaced more closely together than those in the center. On the fourth level are eight round-arch

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 3

Germania Life Insurance Company Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

windows. Running horizontally, atop the mansard, facing south, is a lighted sign that originally read "Germania Life," later read "Guardian Life," and now reads "W Union Square."

The east side of the building is faced with beige brick with granite beltcourses above the first and third stories and at the level of the cornices atop the building. Raised brick beltcourses continue the effect of the rustication and banding on the street elevations. Each floor is articulated by seven window openings set in a rhythm of two-three-two. The arrangement and ornamentation of windows on the mansard echoes that on the west elevation overlooking Park Avenue South. On the north facade the corner extending from Park Avenue South is clad in beige brick laid to resemble quoins. The remainder of the facade is clad in less expensive red brick, with the exception of the line of the main cornice above the sixteenth story which is marked by a band of beige brick. The north elevation is broken into two sections by the central light court. To the west of the court, the north facade has four vertical bands of window openings, while the section to the east has only one band of window openings; all of these openings have been bricked in. Simple rectangular windows, not all of which are original, open into the courtyard.

The entrance lobby was modernized in the 1960s and again in the 1980s, and converted into a hotel lobby in 2000. Also in 2000, the office floors were converted into hotel rooms. There are, however, several notable historic interiors that are extant. The most significant spaces are the former General Office, also known as the cashier's room (now the hotel's ballroom), and the adjacent elevator lobby, both on the second story. The elevator surrounds in the second-floor lobby are cast bronze and retain transom bars ornamented with cartouches and an egg-and-dart molding. The elevators are set within round arches (the arches have been filled in and the elevator doors are not original). The elevators open into a long narrow lobby with a floor covered in geometric pattern using five multi-colored marbles. The walls are a white English marble with light grey veining and are detailed with pilasters, a ball molding, and an egg-and-dart molding. The length of the hall contains a series of round arches, creating an arcade, that support five shallow ceiling domes. The spandrels of each dome are ornamented with GLIC ciphers. A fasces band runs around the base of each dome and is interrupted periodically by the arch keystones. In the center of each dome is a lighting fixture. Three entrances on the south side of the hall, opposite the elevators, lead into the former cashier's office. These are flanked by panels with fans of yellow marble. To the west of the arcade the hallway continues with a simpler design. On the ceiling of this section are large square panels with egg-and-dart, acanthus, Greek key, and dentil moldings and a light fixture with a garland surround flanked by smaller rectangular panels with egg-and-dart and bead-and-reel moldings and a central fasces form. The floor of the hall in this section has the types of marble laid in a geometric design that is simpler than that in the elevator lobby. The walls have a marble wainscot about seven feet tall, with plaster above. To the east of the elevator lobby is a small rectangular space with a high marble wainscot with pilasters. Above the marble walls are plaster panels – fasces above each of the three extant pilasters, a central cartouche with GLIC cipher flanked by garlands, and two smaller cartouches with fleur-de-lis and draped clothe.

The former General Office or cashier's room is a large, double-height, rectangular space with elaborate ornament. The room has white marble and plaster on the walls and gray marble baseboards. The room is entered from the north through three rectangular openings with double doors (not original). Above these are

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 4

Germania Life Insurance Company Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

white marble transom bars and blind fanlights. Each marble arch has a keystone and an acanthus molding. Flanking the central door are thin Corinthian pilasters supporting entablatures with egg-and-dart moldings set below the cornices. In the spandrels are panels with GLIC initials with a garland and ribbon decoration. Above the entrances is a modified Doric entablature with expanded triglyphs and groups of guttae. Above the central entrance is a large wall clock. The east and west walls of the room contain pairs of rectangular openings with eared marble enframements and entablatures with guttae and egg-and-dart moldings. On the upper walls are cartouches with GLIC ciphers. On the south wall are three large round-arch windows, each with a keystone and cartouches with GL ciphers in the spandrels. The ceiling is coffered with a large rosette in each coffer. The room has an ornate plaster cornice. The floor is marble and terrazzo, covered with a carpet.

Other notable historic interior features are the stair that runs from the lobby to midway between the fourth and fifth floors, consisting of white marble stairs, wainscot, and railings; the second-floor mezzanine lobby with its marble tile floor, marble Ionic pilasters, ceiling with deeply recessed square panels ornamented with dentils and acanthus, marble doorway enframements, and its south wall with marble pilasters and wainscot; and the elevator lobbies on the upper floors, each with five elevator surrounds with cast-bronze pilasters and capped by a cast-bronze frieze with vertical grooves and the initial G, and with floors of marble tile in several different colors (these lobbies have been split into two parts – one for hotel guests with three elevators and one for service with two elevators; in the latter, the floor has been conserved and protected with linoleum).

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave
- ☐ **D** a cemetery
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Ethnic Heritage – European (German)

Period of Significance:

1910-1950

Significant Dates:

1910-1911; 1917

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

D'Oench & Yost

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by historic American Building Survey

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other repository: _____

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

Germania Life Insurance Company Building

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

The Germania Life Insurance Company Building, later known as the Guardian Life Insurance Company Building, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C as an important early twentieth-century New York City office building erected for a prominent insurance company. The building was designed by the local firm of D'Oench & Yost and is generally considered to be this firm's most significant structure. The building was built by the Germania Life Insurance Company for its headquarters and served as its main office from its completion in 1911 until 1999. The location and design of the building reflects the insurance industry's interest in the use of architecture as a form of advertising. Thus, the building was designed with an enormous, four-story crowning mansard capped by a very early example of a lighted sign with the company's name. The building is also eligible under criterion A for its significance in the history of the German immigrant community in America. The Germania Life Insurance Company was established in 1860 specifically to sell life insurance to members of the German-American community. It was founded by German immigrants and its architect, Albert Frederick D'Oench, was also of German ancestry. The major force behind the establishment of the company and its president until 1897 was Hugo Wesendonck, a wealthy German-American who had come to America in 1849. The company established its headquarters in New York because New York City had the country's largest German immigrant community, but the firm's interests quickly expanded to German communities throughout America and offices were also opened in Europe.

The Germania Life Insurance Company was established in 1860, when twenty-one men, almost all of whom were German immigrants, met to discuss the idea of organizing a life insurance company that would cater specifically to German Americans.¹ The leading figure behind the idea of establishing a life insurance company for German Americans was Hugo Wesendonck, heir to a large German textile fortune (his father owned a silk-dyeing factory) who had come to America after the failed revolution of 1848. Wesendonck was a lawyer and had been a member of the Frankfurt National Assembly. He escaped to the United States after being accused of treason and tried (in absentia) and sentenced to death in 1849. Wesendonck soon settled in Philadelphia where he became a successful silk importer and a prominent member of that city's German community. In 1859, he moved to New York where a year later he used his wealth and connections with the elite in New York's German community to organize the Germania Life Insurance Company. Among the insurance company's other prominent founders were Oswald Ottendorfer, publisher of the German-language newspaper the *Staats-Zeitung*; banker Joseph Seligman; merchant Isaac Bernheimer; and C. Godfrey Gunther, who would soon become mayor of the city.

The idea of establishing a company to insure life goes back to eighteenth-century England. The first life insurance company was incorporated in the United States in 1812 with the formation of the Pennsylvania Company for Insurance of Lives and Granting Annuities. This company was followed by the New York Life Insurance and Trust Company in 1830, the Girard Life Insurance Company in 1836, and by other firms in the 1840s and 1850s. The life insurance industry in America grew with incredible rapidity -- in 1851 policies were

¹ The major source for the history of the Germania Life Insurance Company is Anita Rapone, *The Guardian Life Insurance Company, 1860-1920: A History of a German-American Enterprise* (New York: New York University Press, 1987). Also see Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 2

Germania Life Insurance Company Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

worth about \$100 million, while by 1867 they were worth over one billion.² The early insurance companies established in the United States catered to a general population; none attempted to attract policy holders of a specific national group until the establishment of the Germania Life Insurance Company.

Germans had been arriving in North America almost from the start of European settlement, but it was in the 1840s that the first major wave of German migrants arrived in the United States. Some of the new immigrants were liberal political refugees escaping from the failed revolution of 1848, but most were poor, largely rural migrants escaping from famine and poverty. Most of the political refugees were from the educated middle class and most became successful in this country. By 1860, the German immigrant community was extraordinarily large. In New York City alone, the German-born population was 119,984 in 1860 (the total population of New York City was 813,669); the number was swelled by the addition of the children of German-born immigrants. Many social and business organizations flourished in New York's German community, including banks, newspapers, clubs, singing societies, schools, hospitals, churches, and synagogues. Thus, it was logical that as life insurance became increasingly important in America, a firm would be founded to cater specifically to German-Americans.

The New York State Insurance Department granted the Germania permission to issue life insurance policies on July 10, 1860 and seven days later the company issued its first policy. By the end of 1860 the company has 170 policy holders. From the start the Germania was interested in offering policies to German-American New Yorkers, as well as those who lived outside of New York City. In order to facilitate this, the company established agencies in cities with large German communities. In July 1860, agencies were approved for Baltimore, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Davenport, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia, with Newark and St. Paul added by the end of the month. By 1862, an office had opened in San Francisco, establishing the Germania as a transcontinental company, and in 1865, the firm entered the southern market. All of these were cities with substantial German communities. In 1868 Germania became the first American insurance company to open offices in Europe. The company reasoned that since it had been successful at offering life insurance to Germans in the United States it could be even more successful in Germany itself. Several of the founding board members of the Germania had either returned to Germany or were frequently in Europe and were able to assist in establishing an office in Berlin, with branch agencies elsewhere in what would soon become a united Germany and in Austria, Belgium, France, Holland, and Switzerland. In 1876 the firm purchased an office building in Berlin for its European operations.

The Germania Life Insurance Company initially occupied offices at 90 Broadway. In 1869, the firm moved into larger rented quarters at 293-95 Broadway. In 1872, the company moved again, to 287 Broadway at Reade Street. Wesendonck believed that the Germania should own its own office building and in 1882 the company began looking for a building to purchase, finally settling on the building at 20 Nassau Street in 1884. The firm remained on Nassau Street until moving into the tall office building that it constructed on the corner of Park Avenue South and East 17th Street in 1910-11.

² Rapone, p. 8.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 3

Germania Life Insurance Company Building

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

The construction of a new office building was the idea of Cornelius Doremus who became president of the company in 1898 after Wesendonck's retirement. According to Anita Rapone, in her history of the Germania, Doremus realized that the old building on Nassau Street was no longer competitive with newer buildings and that the space not occupied by the Germania could no longer be profitably rented.³ A decision was made that the construction of a new building would be a fitting way for the Germania to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. After examining many sites, the directors decided, in 1909, to purchase the plot on the northeast corner of Park Avenue South (then still known as Fourth Avenue) and East 17th Street. The corner site cost the Germania \$535,000. The new building was to be at least sixteen stories tall so that it would not be dwarfed by the other commercial buildings that were transforming Park Avenue South from a street of mid-nineteenth-century houses and churches, into an avenue of large-scale commercial structures.⁴ The initial plan was later enlarged by the addition of a monumental, four-story mansard roof. As completed in May 1911, the building cost \$1,453,230.02, in addition to the price of the land. The majority of space in the building was rented to other tenants, bringing a substantial income to the Germania.

When the Board of Directors of the Germania decided to build a new office headquarters it did not have far to look for a designer, since one of the directors was architect Albert Frederick D'Oench (1852-1918) of the firm of D'Oench & Yost.⁵ D'Oench was born in St. Louis, the son of German immigrants. He went to Washington University in St. Louis and then studied architecture at Polytechnic Institute in Brooklyn and at the Royal Polytechnic Institute in Stuttgart. In the late 1870s, D'Oench settled in New York where he worked in the offices of Leopold Eidlitz (a German immigrant), Richard Morris Hunt, and Edward E. Raht (also apparently German), before establishing his own practice in 1881. In 1900, the firm of D'Oench & Yost was established with Joseph Warren Yost (1847-1923). Yost was from Ohio where he had a successful career designing schools, hospitals, and other institutional buildings before moving to New York in 1900 to join D'Oench in partnership. The Germania Life Insurance Company Building is generally cited as the firm's most significant building.

D'Oench & Yost designed a building that would be a highly visible physical representation of the importance and stability of the Germania Life Insurance Company. The steel-framed skyscraper is located on a very visible site across from Union Square Park. The street facades of the building are clad entirely in granite, an impressive and expensive building stone that lends an appropriate sense of strength and stability to the structure. The building is designed with Beaux-Arts-inspired Baroque detailing, especially notable for its use of various patterns of rustication and banding. In order to draw attention to the building, it is crowned by a massive four-story mansard clad in Spanish tile with copper trim. On top of this is a large lighted advertising sign that originally spelled out "Germania Life," but was altered to "Guardian Life" after the company's name was

³ Rapone, pp. 127-29, discusses the construction of the new headquarters building.

⁴ The redevelopment of Park Avenue South is discussed in A.C. David, "The New Architecture: The First American Type of Real Value," *Architectural Record* 43 (December 1910), 389-403.

⁵ For Albert Frederick D'Oench, see obituary, *New York Times*, July 22, 1918, p. 11; *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 27 (New York: James T. White & Co., 1939), 1939, p. 109; and Henry F. Withey and Elise Rathbun Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (1956; reprinted, Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1970), p. 173. For Joseph Warren Yost, see *National Cyclopaedia*, vol. 13 (1906), p. 495; *Who's Who in America* (Chicago, 1920), p. 3172; obituary, *New York Times*, November 27, 1923, p. 19; and Withey and Withey, p. 676.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 4

Germania Life Insurance Company Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

changed; it now reads "W Union Square". This is a very early use of lighted advertising signage. The publicly-accessible spaces on the interior were also designed to be impressive, with classical details and marblework in the double-height general office on the second story and in the lobby (demolished) and halls.

Germania was not the first insurance company to realize the value of architecture to the creation of its image and to advertising the company. Insurance companies were among the first businesses (along with newspapers) to use the skyscraper as a means of advertising and creating an identity. In a market that was extremely competitive, life insurance companies saw architecture as a means of establishing an identity. The Equitable Life Assurance Company (NHL, 6-2-78) erected an impressive mansarded building on Broadway and Pine Street in 1868-70, that was also the first office building with an elevator. New York Life commissioned a building, on Broadway and Leonard Street, from McKim, Mead & White in 1894 that has a clock tower once capped by the company's logo (NR listed 6-28-82), and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company commissioned the world's tallest building for a site on Madison Square in 1907 (NHL, 6-2-78); this building became the company's logo. The Germania followed in this pattern, building a notable and noticeable structure with French Renaissance and Baroque detailing, that is an important element of the Union Square skyline.

The outbreak of World War I in Europe strained the Germania's European business, but it was America's entry into the war that created the largest problem for this business since German-American firms were subject to charges of being un-American. The company took steps to support the war effort, invested in war loans, and, after extensive debate, decided in December 1917, to change its name to The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America – a name that both dropped reference to Germany and specifically added the word America. The prominent Germania Life sign on the roof of the headquarters building was immediately rebuilt to read Guardian Life. After the war ended, Guardian sold its European business and became exclusively an American life insurance company, one with less and less connection to the country's German community. In 1985, the Guardian was the twentieth largest life insurance company in the United States. In 1998, the Guardian decided to sell the building and move to offices in Lower Manhattan. The building was converted to the W Union Square Hotel in 1999-2000.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 1

Germania Life Insurance Company Building

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

"Comparative Types in Office and Loft Buildings," *Architecture and Building* 43 (July 1911), 425-31.

"C. T. Wills to Erect Building For Germania Life," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* 85 (January 29, 1910), 221-22.

Kesslinger, J. M., *Guardian of a Century, 1860-1960*. NY: Guardian Life Insurance Company of America, 1960.

Nadel, Stanley, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1845-80*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Germania Life Insurance Company Building Designation Report*, report prepared by Lisa Koenigsberg. New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1988.

Rapone, Anita, *The Guardian Life Insurance Company, 1860-1920: A History of a German-American Enterprise*. NY: New York University Press, 1987.

Germania Life Insurance Company Building
Name of Property

New York County, New York
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one-half acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 1 8 5 8 5 3 6 0 4 5 0 9 7 9 0
Zone Easting Northing

3 1 8
Zone Easting Northing

2 1 8

4 1 8

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By (See continuation sheet)

name/title Contact: Kathy Howe, Historic Preservation Specialist

organization NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation date 1/11/01

street & number Peebles Island, P.O. Box 189 telephone (518) 237-8643, ext. 3266

city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188-0189

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Related Companies, L.P.

street & number 625 Madison Avenue telephone (212) 421-5333

city or town New York state NY zip code 10022

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20503

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

Germania Life Insurance Company Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of this nomination is outlined on the accompanying map.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire lot on which the original Germania Life Insurance Company Building was erected.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 11 Page 1

Germania Life Insurance Company Building

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

11. Form Prepared By:

Andrew S. Dolkart
116 Pinehurst Avenue, S-11
New York, New York 10033
212-568-2480

(prepared for:
Higgins & Quasebarth
270 Lafayette Street
New York, New York 10012)

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 12 Page 1

Germania Life Insurance Company Building

Name of Property

New York County, New York

County and State

Additional Documentation

Photographs

Guardian Life Insurance Company Building

New York County, NY

Photographer: Ward Dennis

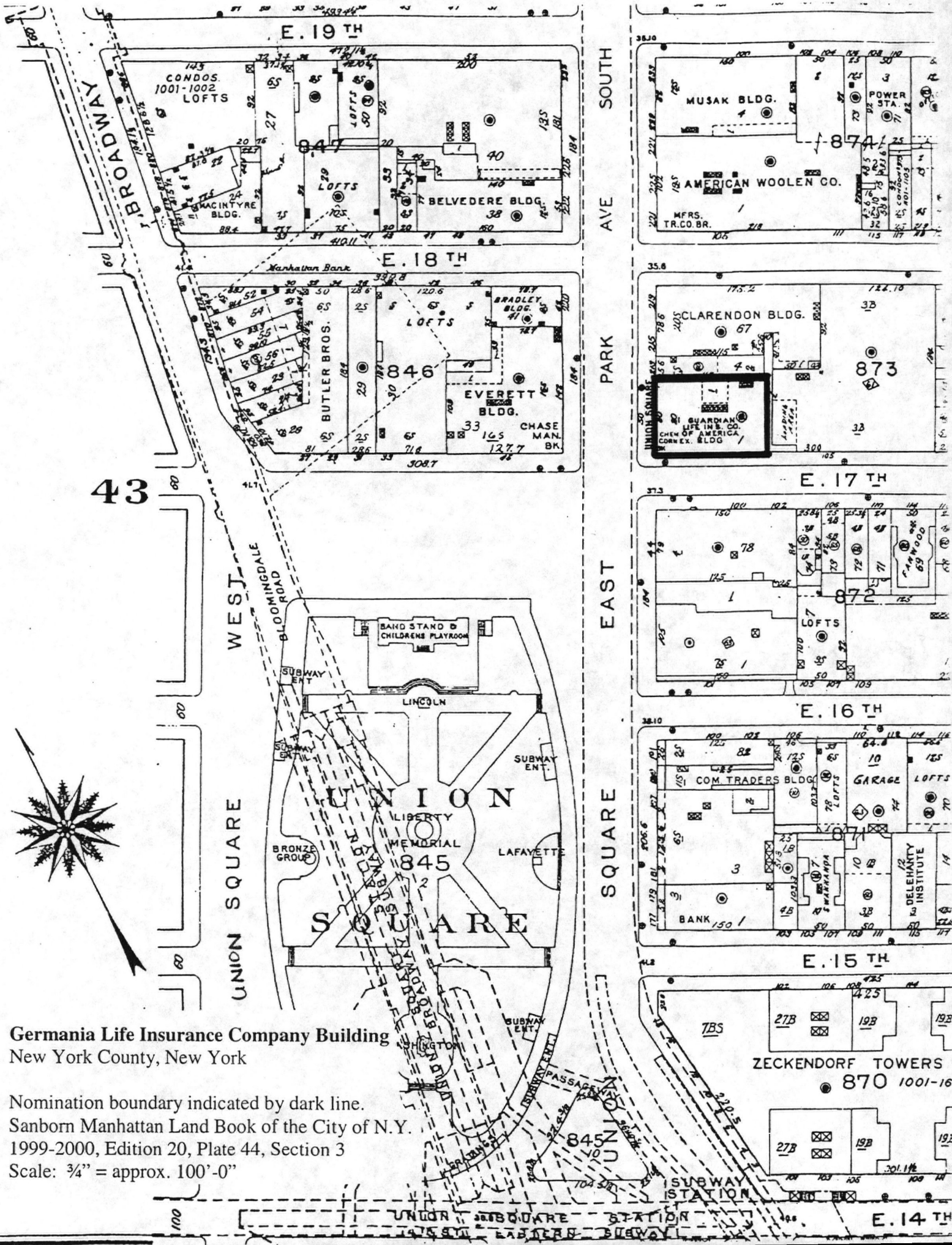
Date of photographs: December 2000

Location of negative: Higgins & Quasebarth

270 Lafayette Street, Suite 810

New York, NY 10012

1. General view of primary (west and south) facades, looking northeast from Union Square Park.
2. Detail of mansard roof and neon sign (south façade), looking northeast.
3. View of secondary (east) façade, looking west along East 17th Street.
4. View of main hotel lobby, looking east from entrance at Park Avenue South.
5. View of hotel lounge, looking south from entrance at Park Avenue South.
6. View of hotel ballroom at second floor (formerly the General Office), looking northeast.
7. Second-floor elevator lobby, looking east.
8. Typical hotel room interior, 14th floor, looking southwest.



Germania Life Insurance Company Building
New York County, New York

Nomination boundary indicated by dark line.
Sanborn Manhattan Land Book of the City of N.Y.
1999-2000, Edition 20, Plate 44, Section 3
Scale: 3/4" = approx. 100'-0"

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Germania Life Insurance Company Building

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, New York

DATE RECEIVED: 4/18/01 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 5/03/01
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/19/01 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 6/03/01
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 01000556

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 5/25/01 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



Germania Life Insurance
Company Building
New York County, N.Y.

#1



Germania Life Insurance Company
Building

New York County, N.Y.

#2



Germania Life Insurance
Company Building
New York County, N.Y.
#3



Germania Life Insurance
Company Building
New York County, NY.
#4



Germania Life Insurance
Company Building
New York County, N.Y.
#5



Germania Life Insurance Company
Building
New York County, N.Y.
#6



Germania Life Insurance
Company Building
New York County, N.Y.

#7



Germania Life Insurance
Company Building
New York County, N.Y.

8



NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

BROOKLYN QUADRANGLE
NEW YORK
7.5 MINUTE SERIES PLANIMETRIC
NW/4 BROOKLYN 15' QUADRANGLE

405737 DP

Germania Life
Insurance Company
Building
New York County, NY

Brooklyn Quad
1:24000
Zone: 1B
Easting: 585360
Northing: 4509790



Prepared and published in 1975 by the New York State Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration.

Map base from 1967 U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute quadrangle. Map revisions made using 1974 aerial photography, construction plans, official records and other sources. Features revised include: highways and other transportation facilities; civil boundaries; recreation sites; hydrography; and buildings. Grey tint indicates intensively developed areas in which only landmark buildings are shown.

Revisions may not comply with National Map Accuracy Standards. Correspondence concerning this and other maps of the Department of Transportation should be directed to: Map Information Unit, New York State Department of Transportation, State Campus, Albany, New York 12232.

1975 revisions by F. G. Califano



QUADRANGLE LOCATION



Polyconic projection, 1927 North American datum.

1000-meter ticks based on the New York Transverse Mercator grid. Between 72° and 78° West Longitude, this grid is identical to Zone 18 of the Universal Transverse Mercator grid. Areas east of 72° and west of 78° are direct mathematical extensions of Zone 18.

10,000-foot ticks based on the New York Plane Coordinate grid, Long Island Zone.

ENTIRE MAP AREA IS WITHIN THE NEW YORK CITY METROPOLITAN URBAN AREA. Contours, at 10-foot intervals, shown unrevised from 1967 U.S. Geological Survey map. Dashed lines represent 5-foot contours. Datum is mean sea level.

BOUNDARIES:

State.....
County.....
Town or City.....
Incorporated Village.....
Federal-Aid Urban Area.....

ROADS:

Touring Route markers:
Interstate.....
U. S.
State.....
State Highway number and limit.....
County road.....
Interchange number.....
Divided highways and streets:
Wide mail.....
Narrow mail or barrier.....
Undivided highways and streets:
.....
Vehicle track; trail.....

BROOKLYN QUADRANGLE
SECOND EDITION-1975



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

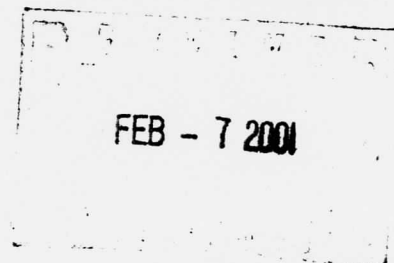
100 Old Slip New York NY 10005 TEL: 212-487-6820 FAX: 212-487-6796 TTY: 212-487-6745

<http://nyc.gov/landmarks/>



RONDA WIST
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
rwist@lpc.nyc.gov

February 5, 2001



Ruth L. Pierpont, Director
NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Peebles Island, P.O. Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: (Former) Germania Life Building, 201 Park Avenue South,
Manhattan

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chairman Jennifer J. Raab in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of the Germania Life Building for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The Commission supports the nomination of the (Former) Germania Life Building. On September 6, 1988, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission voted unanimously to designate the building.

The Commission has determined that the Germania Life Building appears to meet the criteria for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Sincerely yours,

Ronda Wist
Ronda Wist

cc: Jennifer J. Raab, Chairman
Mary Beth Betts