United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

## National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only received FEB 2 9 1980 date entered APR 2 3 19

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

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depository for survey records Landm	arks Preservation Com	mission, 305 Broadw	(See continua <b>ya</b> y
city, town New York		state	New York 10007

## 7. Description

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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Chanin Building, built in 1927-29, rises 56 stories at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 42nd Street. Designed by the architectural firm of Sloan & Robertson with sculptural decoration by Rene Chambellan, it is a major example of Art Deco architecture in New York City. Erected under the supervision of the Chanin Construction Company, the building still serves as the organization's headquarters.

The first 17 stories completely cover the plot except on the center of the Lexington Avenue facade which is recessed above the fourth story. Major setbacks begin above the seventeenth story, forming a pyramidal base for the tower which rises uninterrupted from the thirtieth to the fifty-second story. The upper four stories of the tower are further recessed and accented with buttresses. The steel frame is clad with buff brick, terra cotta and limestone, and is ornamented in such a way as to emphasize some of the special functions within.

As was the custom in skyscraper design, the architects were interested in establishing a clearly defined base for the composition and a strong interest at and relationship to the street. The first floor was intended for shops. Originally the plate-glass shop windows were enclosed by bronze enframements set in Belgian black marble. Later alterations have obscured some of the original detail. Also at first floor level are major entrances on Lexington Avenue and 42nd Street. Above the first floor runs a bronze frieze telling the story of evolution. It shows different kinds of plant and animal life, beginning with low marine forms, then more complex forms, and finally birds and fish. At the second and third floors, which were intended for financial institutions, are triple window groups framed in bronze and divided between the floors by bronze spandrel panels with characteristic Art Deco ornament. Each window group is flanked by limestone piers with ornamented terra-cotta capitals. The windows above the entrances are given a distinctive treatment with ornamental spandrel panels of a different design. Incorporated into the window framing are curved bronze supports holding canopies above the entrances. The canopies themselves have been The fourth story is completely covered with an elaborate pattern of stylized plant forms executed in terra cotta. The use of such stylized forms is a characteristic associated with Art Deco design.

On the Lexington Avenue side, a series of buttresses at the fifth and sixth stories accent the recessed portion of the facade. The form of these buttresses echoes the form of those at the crown of the tower. Buttress forms extending from the thirtieth to the forty-ninth floor also accentuate the corners of the brick-faced tower. The termination of the buttress forms at the forty-ninth floor indicates some of the special functions in the floors above. The fiftieth and the fifty-first floors - now converted to office space - originally housed a theater which was to serve the theatrical division of the Chanin Organization. The Chanin offices continue to be housed in the crown of the tower which begins at the fifty-second floor. The most prominent features of the crown are the protruding buttresses which provide a distinctive termination

(See continuation sheet)

FHR-8-300A (11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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DATE ENTERED APR 2 3 1980

New York County
CONTINUATION SHEET Chanin Building ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE

for the tower. Projecting ornament executed in abstract patterns at the fifty-second floor adds further interest to the tower. Originally a battery of 212 flood-lights illuminated the crown of the tower at night, adding to its dramatic effect on the skyline. This emphasis on dramatic illumination is another quality associated with Art Deco architecture, and it is characteristically displayed in one of Hugh Ferriss' noted renderings of the building .<sup>2</sup>

The lobby of the Chanin Building retains most of its original fabric. A long corridor connects the entrances from 42nd and 41st Streets with a secondary entrance from Lexington Avenue. Three banks of elevators are perpendicular to the interior corridor. A stairway to the IRT Subway is situated near the 42nd Street entrance. Floors are finished in terrazzo, and divided into geometric panels by bronze strips and inlays. The walls are finished with tan marble, with bronze grillwork and door moldings.

The interior decoration is the epitome of Art Deco styling, with the "City of Opportunity" as the theme. This is depicted by two series of sculptures and bronze grilles which portray the process by which an individual in New York could rise from a humble beginning to a position of wealth and influence. Along the walls are eight sculptured figures that represent enlightenment, vision, courage and achievement, activity, effort, endurance and success. The bronze radiator grilles beneath each sculpture give an abstract modernistic interpretation of the themes. Incised bronze elevator doors, a modernistic clock face, and the original tenant directory add to the splendor of the main lobby. The designs are the work of Jacques Delamarre, who served as chief architect of the Chanin Construction Company for most of his life.

<sup>1</sup>The text of this report has been taken almost in its entirety from the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report, Chanin Building (LP-0993), November, 1978, by Marjorie Pearson.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>See: Dan Klein, "Chanin Building, New York," <u>Connoisseur</u>, 186 (July 1974), 163.

### 8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899 x 1900–	Areas of Significance  archeology-prehistoric archeology-historic agriculture  x architecture art commerce communications		ing	_ landscape architectur _ law _ literature _ military _ music _ philosophy _ politics/government	re religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1927-29	Builder/Architect S	loan 8	Robertson	

#### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Chanin Building is an impressive Art Deco skyscraper designed by the prominent architectural firm of Sloan & Robertson. It was the first major skyscraper to be built in the area around Grand Central Terminal, anticipating a major shift in the business district of the city. The building is distinguished by the form and massing of the tower which was designed in accordance with the 1916 New York zoning regulations. Elegant ornament, designed by the noted architectural sculptor Rene Chambellan in collaboration with Jacques Delamarre of the Chanin firm, enhance the base and crown of the building, and when it was completed in 1929 it was praised as being "a splendid contribution to twentieth-century architecture." It was built by the Chanin Construction Company to serve as the Chanin headquarters and to be an efficient, upto-date, progressive structure that would attract the modern business man. Today, the Chanin Building remains a striking visual asset to the Grand Central area.

Irwin S. Chanin (b.1892) established his firm in 1919 to build one-family houses in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, after studying engineering at Cooper Union, working on subway construction in New York and Philadelphia, and participating in the construction of a poison gas factory for the U. S. Army during World War I. His first venture in Bensonhurst was so successful that he brought his brother Henry I. Chanin (1893-1973) into the firm, and they proceeded to build more houses and also apartment buildings in Brooklyn and then erected an office building in downtown Brooklyn. Extending their activities to Manhattan in 1924, they constructed the Fur Center Building. That same year the Chanins expanded into the theater business, eventually building eight theaters, including the fabulous 6000-seat Roxy. The Chanins also managed a number of these theaters. The 1400-room Hotel Lincoln on Eighth Avenue between 44th and 45th Streets was completed and opened by the Chanins in 1928. Following the completion of the Chanin Building in 1929, the firm expanded its activities into the Manhattan apartment field, building the Majestic and Century apartment houses on Central Park West. Extensive suburban building activity occupied much of the firm's time during the 1930s and 1940s. A notable example was Green Acres, a residential park community in Valley Stream, Long Island, begun in 1936. During World War II the firm built 2000 prefabricated dwellings in Newport News, Virginia, five hangars at National Airport in Washington, the Naval Ordnance Laboratory in White Oak, Maryland, and five Navy powder magazine buildings in Indian Head, Maryland. The firm has also built numerous manufacturing buildings in the New York City area and the impressive Coney Island Pumping Station for the City of New York. By 1952 when Irwin S. Chanin was profiled in the National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, the Chanin Organization was composed of approximately 25 firms and corporations engaged in architecture, engineering, and construction, and in ownership and operation of real estate.

In August 1926 the Chanins acquired a 105-year leasehold on the site of the (See continuation sheet)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

(See continuation sheet)

10. Geographical Data	See Attached	Site Map	IITM NOT VERIFIE
Acreage of nominated property less than 1 acre Quadrangle name Central Park, NY, NJ UMT References	ACREAGE NO	T VERHELD	e scale 1:24000
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The evaluated significance of this property within the national state	state is:	ilding activ le example'w	tensive suburban bu and 1940s. A notab Stream, Lone Island
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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APR 2 3 1980

CHANIN BUILDING

CONTINUATION SHEET

New York County ITEM NUMBER &

PAGE 2

Manhattan Storage Warehouse on the west side of Lexington Avenue between 41st and 42nd Streets in order to build their new office tower. Plans were filed and work begun in 1927. When the steel structure work was completed on July 2, 1928, the Chanins followed their traditional practice of driving two gold rivets into a column on the uppermost floor. On January 23,1929, exactly one year after Irwin S. Chanin drove the first rivet into the steel frame, construction was completed--testimony to the skill of the workmen and the efficiency of the Chanin Construction Company. It was opened for business that January 29 and was hailed as "another step in the evolution of the skyscraper." At that time, it was the first major skyscraper to have been built in the area around Grand Central Terminal, anticipating a major shift in the business district of the city. notable skyscrapers such as the Chrysler and Daily News Buildings soon followed. Its 680-foot height was then exceeded only by the Woolworth Building and Metropoltian Life Tower in New York and the Cleveland Terminal Building in Cleveland. Irwin S. Chanin was not, however, interested in creating the world's tallest office building but rather in building an efficient, up-to-date, progressive structure that would attract the modern business man and be a credit to the Chanin firm. To create this image, he commissioned the architectural firm of Sloan & Robertson.

Sloan & Robertson was one of the major New York architectural firms of the 1920s and '30s. John Sloan (1888-1954) studied architecture at New York University, then supervised construction for the U.S. Army in various capacities between 1908 and 1920. In private practice in 1920, he received the commission for the Pershing Square Building, 100 East 42nd Street. He formed a partnership in 1924 with T. Markoe Robertson (1878-1962) who had been educated at Yale University and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In addition to the Chanin Building, the firm was responsible for the Graybar Building, 420 Lexington Avenue; the Maritime Exchange Building, 80 Broad Street; the 29 Broadway Office Building; the Plaza Building, 625 Madison Avenue; apartment buildings at 1 Beekman Place and 895 Park Avenue; and alterations, modernization, and an annex for the St. Regis Hotel. The firm was also active in the design of buildings for hospitals and institutions, including the House of Detention for Women at 10 Greenwich Avenue, the Ward's Island Sewage Disposal Plant, the Rikers Island Penitentiary, buildings for the Harlem Hospital, and the Southampton Hospital. Architectural plans for the West Side Elevated Highway between Canal and 72nd Streets and the New York State exhibit building, marine amphitheater and stage at the 1939 New York World's Fair were also carried out by the firm. Chanin Building, as in so much of their work during the 1930s, they created a striking example of Art Deco architecture, using that most characteristic Art Deco Building type, the skyscraper.

FHR-8-300A (11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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CHANIN BUILDING

CONTINUATION SHEET New York County ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

The Chanin Building rises 56 stories in a series of setbacks culminating in a tower, designed in accordance with the 1916 zoning ordinance. The site itself, which was bounded by streets on three sides, was governed by three sets of zoning rules. This made the tower rather than the street frontage the controlling factor in regard to massing. Critic Matlack Price praised the Chanin Building as "an impressive realization of the most hopeful predictions that were made years ago, when the zoning laws first imposed the set-back restrictions on tall structures. At once it became necessary to design in masses rather than in facades." The design of the tower was also influenced by the widely publicized entry submitted by Eliel Saarinen in the competition for a new building for the Chicago Tribune (1922). The Saarinen design proved a fertile source for many Art Deco architects.

The ornament of the building was designed by the noted architectural sculptor Rene Chambellan (1893-1955) in collaboration with Jacques Delamarre (b. 1907), head of the architectural staff of the Chanin Construction Company. Among the buildings for which Chambellan executed architectural sculpture were Radio City Music Hall and other buildings at Rockefeller Center, the East Side Airline Terminal, the Russell Sage Foundation Building, the Tribune Tower in Chicago, the Sterling Library at Yale, and the Pershing Stadium in Vincennes, France. In the Chanin Building Delamarre was responsible for many of the details of the interior design and through the years supervised the many projects which the Chanin organization chose to design "in-house." Chambellan and Delamarre also collaborated on the design of the sculptural reliefs and bronze grilles adorning the vestibules inside the building entrances. They symbolically portray various aspects of the theme "the City of Opportunity," telling "the story of a city in which it is possible for a man to rise from a humble station to wealth and influence by sheer power of his mind and hands." This, in fact, was a tribute to the success and achievement of Irwin S. Chanin.

When completed in 1929, the Chanin Building was praised by architectural critic Matlack Price as being "a splendid contribution to twentieth-century architecture...that...powerfully rationalizes all the novel features of this new style, and...a splendid contribution to the architecture of all time because it is a good design." The quality of the design and the ornament continue to delight and are now recognized as exemplifying the characteristics of the Art Deco skyscraper. It remains a striking visual asset to the Grand Central area and continues to function successfully as an office building.

**United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service** 

### **National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form**

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CHANIN BUILDING Continuation sheet

NEW YORK COUNTY, N.Y.

Item number 8 Page 4

Matlack Price, "The Chanin Building," Architectural Forum, 50 (May 1929), 699

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#### **United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

### **National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form**

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CHANIN BUILDING Continuation sheet NEW YORK COUNTY, N.Y.

Item number

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  - XI, p. 1; January 20, 1928, p. 38; June 29, 1928, p. 45; July 2, 1928,
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  - p. 13; February 3, 1929, XI, p. 1; February 24, 1929, XII, p. 3.

## United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

Chanin Building

Continuation sheet New York County

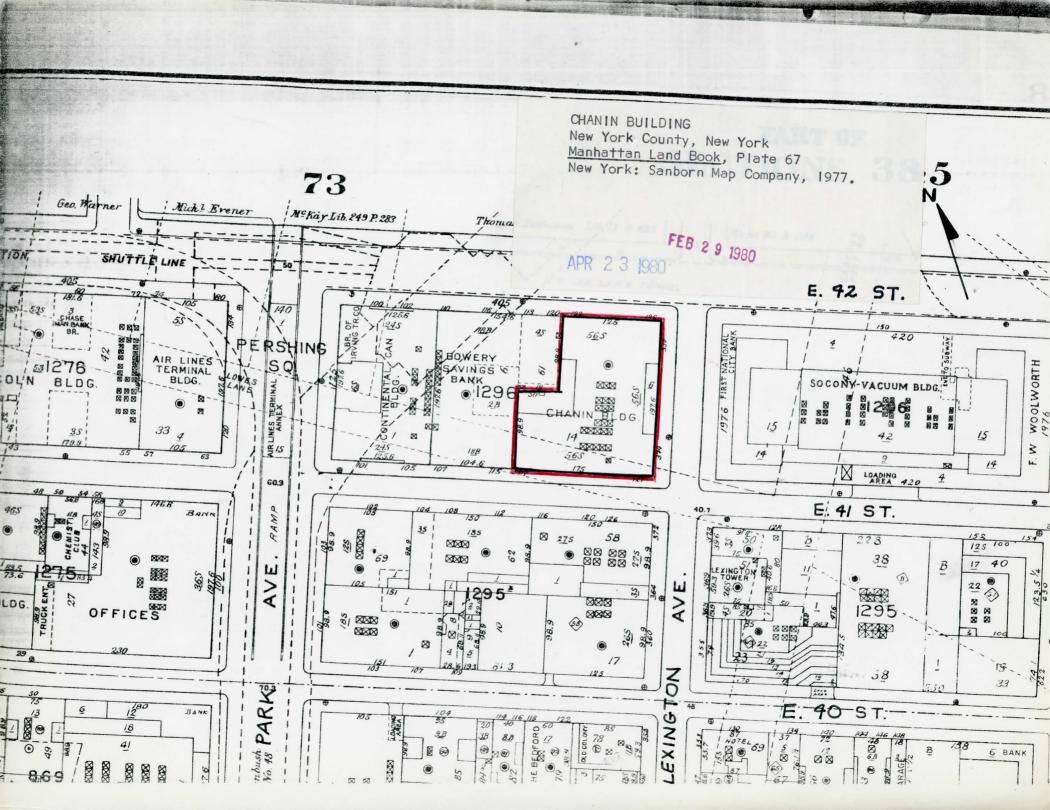
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Page 2

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United States Department of the Interior - Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service



1. Chanin Building 122 East 42nd Street

APR 2 3 1980

New York, NY County
Photo by: Stephen Semigo, 1979
Neg. at: New York City Landmarks

Preservation Commission

View from south

FEB 2 9 1980

1066



APR 23 1980

2. Chanin Building
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY County

Photo by: Stephen Senigo, 1979
Neg, at: New York City Landmarks
Preservation Commission

East facade

3016

FEB 2 9 1980



APR 23 1980

3. Chanin Building 122 East 42nd Street New York, NY County

Photo by: Stephen Senigo, 1979
Neg. at: New York City Landmarks

Preservation Commission

Exterior Buttresses

3086

FEB 2 9 1980

# CHANIN BUILDING

APR 23 1980

4. Chanin Building
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY County
Photo by: Stephen Senigo, 1979
Neg. at: New York City Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Detail

FEB 2 9 1980

4086



5. Chanin Building
122 East 42nd Street
New York, NY

APR 23 1980

Photo by: Stephen Senigo, 1979

Neg. at: New York City Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Exterior Decoration

FEB 2 9 1980

5086



APR 23 1980

6. Chanin Building 122 East 42nd Street New York, NY County

Photo by: Stephen Senigo, 1979

Neg. at: New York City Landmarks

Preservation Commission

Lobby

FEB 2 9 1980

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map

#### ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE

NEW YORK

Date Entered

APR 23 1980

Name

Location

Belnord Apartments

Schinasi House

Ponckhockie Union Chapel

Addison Village Hall

Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society

St. Jean Baptiste Church and Rectory

Bouwerie Lane Theater

Bowery Savings Bank

Chanin Building

289

New York New York County

New York County

Kingston Ulster County

Addison Steuben County

Buffalo Erie County

New York New York County

New York County

New York County

New York County

Also Notified

Honorable Ted Weiss
Honorable Hamilton Fish, Jr.
Honorable Stanley N. Lundine
Honorable Henry J. Nowak
Honorable S. William Green

#### ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NEW YORK STATE

APR 23 1980

Date Entered

Name

Location

St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church

New York New York County

Moore-McMillen House

Staten Island Richmond County

Building at 85 Leonard Street

New York New York County

Reformed Church of Newton Complex

Elmhurst Queens County

New York, Westchester and Boston Railroad Administration Building

Bronk Bronx County

St. Bartholomew's Protestant Episcopal Church and Rectory

Brooklyn Kings County

Hanson Place Seventh Day Adventist Church

Brooklyn Kings County

Union Theological Seminary

New York New York County

Bailey House

New York New York County

Also Notified

Honorable Daniel P. Moynihan

Honorable Jacob K. Javits Honorable John M. Murphy

n Honorable Benjamin S. Rosenthal

m Honorable Mario Biaggi W Honorable Frederick W. Richmond

Honorable Charles B. Rangel

State Historic Preservation Officer Mr. Orin Lehman Commissioner Parks and Recreation Agency Building #1

Empire State Plaza

Albany, New York 12238

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.

#### ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE NEW YORK

Date Entered

APR 2-3 1980

Name

Location

Old Colony Club

New York New York County

Town Hall

New York

New York County

Old Grolier Club

New York

New York County

Public Baths

New York

New York County

Also Notified