United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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

1. Name

historic Liberty Tower

and or common

2. Location

street & number 55 Liberty Street

city, town New York

state New York

3. Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
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<td>X, yes: restricted</td>
<td>government</td>
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<td>NA, being considered</td>
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<td>military</td>
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4. Owner of Property

name 55 Liberty Owners Corp. Z William B. May & Co., Inc.

street & number 3 West 57th Street

city, town New York

state N.Y. 10019

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New York County Register's Office

street & number 31 Chambers Street

city, town New York

state N.Y. 10007

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

(title) Landmarks Preservation Commission

has this property been determined eligible? yes X no

date August 24, 1982

depository for survey records Landmarks Preservation Commission - 20 Vesey Street

city, town New York

state N.Y. 10007
7. Description

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Check one</td>
<td>original site</td>
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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Liberty Tower is a thirty-three story steel frame skyscraper built on water-proof subsurface caissons. It is located between Liberty Street, Liberty Place and Nassau Street in lower Manhattan, completely filling its small lot. The building is freestanding on three sides (photo 1) with the fourth side abutting low-rise commercial structures. The building's three major elevations are clad entirely in white terra cotta and the fourth is faced with white brick.

The building is designed with a traditional three-part composition (photo 2). The base consists of the first two stories, slightly rusticated, the second story being slightly taller than the rest. Stores occupy most of the first floor. The base is divided from the next three floors by a string course. These three stories act as a transition to the shaft; the windows, which have unadorned spandrels, are paired beneath drip lintels on the lower levels, while at the fifth floor they are capped by small cornices. Above the fifth floor the shaft rises, in identical stories, up to the twenty-third floor. Each of these stories has piers between the bays emphasizing the verticality of the shaft, and each has blind Gothic arcades in the spandrels. Beneath and above the twenty-third floor are ornate terra-cotta cornices supported by brackets, with grotesque figures on the piers on the cornice under the twenty-third floor; there are also cornices beneath and above the twenty-seventh floor and above the twenty-eighth floor. The cornice above the twenty-seventh floor projects further from the wall than the other two and is more ornate. Above the twenty-third floor the flat piers of the lower floors become rounded pilasters at the corners.

The copper-clad roof begins at the level of the thirtieth floor and rises 64 feet (photo 4). Inside the roof above the thirtieth floor are the attic floor, the superintendent's floor, and the tank floor. Corners of the roof are adorned with pilasters with pinnacles crowned with finials. The dormers are flanked by small piers surmounted by animals cast in terra cotta.

The main facade of the building is the Liberty Street front. It is divided into three bays and has one large dormer at the roof which is a continuation of the central bay. The side bays have paired double-hung sash windows; the central bay has two groups of paired double-hung sash windows that are a little bit smaller than the windows of the side bays and continue into the large dormer at the thirtieth floor.

The entrance consists of the door opening with a Tudor arch. The bronze and glass entrance doors are surmounted by a bronze transom incorporating Gothic arcades. Above the entrance, extending up to the fifth story, is a four-sided bay window, with double-hung sash windows, surmounted by battlements (photo 5). The door opening and the bay window are flanked by paneled buttresses with pinnacles, rising four stories.

The Liberty Place and Nassau Street fronts are almost identical. Each extends five bays, with the second and fourth bays continuing into large dormers at the roof. The double-hung sash windows in each are paired on both fronts, except for the south bay of the Liberty Place front, where the windows are tripled, reflecting the difference in length of the two sides of the lot.

On all three main elevations the cornices running beneath and above the twenty-seventh floor are interrupted and do not extend across the windows of the bays that continue into the dormers. The north front, faced with white brick with terra-cotta
detail, is practically plain (photo 3).

Liberty Tower was used for commercial offices until 1979, at which time it was converted to co-operative apartments. In conjunction with this conversion the ground level of the building is being restored to its original configuration. The lowest level contains storefronts which open onto the street, one flanking each side of the central building entrance on Liberty Street and five on the Nassau Street elevation. Permastone siding is being removed from the piers between each store to reveal the original plain limestone. Shop windows are plain sheet glass set in metal frames. The floor above this contains a public restaurant, accessible by a marble staircase just inside the main doors. This interior entranceway is also highlighted by marble wainscoting and a vaulted ceiling decorated with modern murals.
8. Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Areas of Significance—Check and justify below</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Specific dates</td>
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Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Liberty Tower is historically and architecturally significant as an exceptional example of the early twentieth century romantically inspired skyscrapers that changed the skyline of New York City. Conceived of as a speculative office building, Liberty Tower was designed in 1909 by Henry Ives Cobb, a nationally known architect whose training was influenced by the principles of both the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Chicago School. Cobb’s design for Liberty Tower combines innovative building technology with traditional Gothic style decoration. A modern steel-cage skyscraper built on water-proof caissons, Liberty Tower retains the traditional three-part vertical division characteristic of late nineteenth century design. Its "modern" terra-cotta cladding takes the traditional forms of pointed arches, pinnacles and grotesque figures. Prominently sited so that it is visible from three sides, Liberty Tower remains one of the most distinctive skyscrapers in lower Manhattan.

The site of the Liberty Tower building was occupied during most of the last half of the nineteenth century by William Cullen Bryant’s New York Evening Post building. In 1909, the property came into the hands of the Liberty-Nassau Building Company. They erected Liberty Tower as a speculative office building for the financial district, within whose confines it stood. They intended it to be an elegant building, catering to the needs of a professional clientele such as stock brokers, financial institutions, and lawyers.

Henry Ives Cobb (1858-1931) was chosen as architect for this project. He received engineering training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Harvard University, studying with William Ware and learning the traditional methods of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Cobb lived and worked in Chicago from 1881 to 1896, formative years for the innovative Chicago School architects. From them he learned the new technical advances in construction, but he was less receptive to their stylistic developments, preferring to stay within the historical modes of his earlier training.

In Chicago, Cobb’s major commissions were for the Chicago Opera House, the Newberry Library, the Chicago Historical Society Building and the Chicago Athletic Association Building. He participated in the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 designing several buildings and serving on the Board of Architects. In 1896 Cobb moved to Washington, D.C., where he designed several buildings for American University. In 1902, he moved to New York, where he built mostly office and commercial buildings, among them the building at 42 Broadway and the Harriman Bank Building as well as Liberty Tower.

In 1909, when Cobb was hired to design Liberty Tower, New York was seeing the construction of increasingly high towers designed in historic styles. These included Ernest Flagg’s Singer Building (1908), with its tall Beaux-Arts-inspired tower, and Napoleon LeBrun's Metropolitan Life Tower (1909, National Historic Landmark listed, 1978). They would soon be eclipsed by Cass Gilbert’s Gothic style Woolworth Building (1913, National Historic Landmark listed, 1966). These skyscrapers
9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: Less than 1 acre.

Quadrangle name: Jersey City, N.J. - N.Y.

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

UTM References

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is on Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 64, Lot 8, as outlined on the attached map, with a scale of 1" = 120'.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

NA

11. Form Prepared By

Contact: Larry Gobrecht, National Register Program Coordinator

Organization: Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau

Date: March 1983

Telephone: (518) 474-0479

City or Town: Albany

State: New York

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national _ state _ local X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Title: Commissioner

Signature: [Signature]

Date: 8/16/83

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register

Date: 9/15/83

Chief of Registration

Attest:

[Signature]

Date: 

GPO 894-785
were the culmination of the development of the tall steel-cage office structure that had begun in the late nineteenth century, and they set the standard for the "romantic skyscrapers" of the first half of the twentieth century.

Cobb brought the influences of both the Ecole des Beaux Arts and the Chicago School to bear on his design for Liberty Tower. Without breaking completely from the tripartite skyscraper division of base-shaft-capital, Cobb managed to merge the three elements in the tower design. His use of full terra-cotta cladding was one of the first in New York.² Using this new material in traditional forms such as Gothic arches, pilasters and bracketed cornices, Cobb created a distinguished example of the new skyscraper.

Throughout his career, the Gothic style was one of Cobb's favorites and Liberty Tower was one of his most successful essays in the style. With its picturesque forms and roofline, Liberty Tower remains today as one of the most distinctive buildings in lower Manhattan.

Footnotes

1. This report was taken almost in its entirety from the text of the Landmarks Preservation Commission designation report, Liberty Tower (LP-1243), August 24, 1982, by Lydia Latchinova.

2. Louis Sullivan had used full terra-cotta cladding in his Bayard-Condict Building of 1897-99, but the use of terra-cotta cladding was slow to be adopted in New York.


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Liberty Tower
Continuation sheet New York County, New York Item number 11

Report Researched and Prepared by:

Virginia Kurshan
Landmarks Preservation Commission
20 Vesey Street
New York, N.Y. 10007

November 1982
(212) 566-7577
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES 
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET 

Liberty Tower 
New York County 
NEW YORK

☐ resubmission 
☐ nomination by person or local government 
☐ owner objection 
☐ appeal

Substantive Review: ☐ sample  ☐ request  ☐ appeal  ☐ NR decision

Reviewer's comments: 

Recomm./Criteria __________
Reviewer __________
Discipline __________
Date __________

Nomination returned for: ____ technical corrections cited below
____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. 1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category Ownership Status Present Use
Public Acquisition Accessible

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? □ yes □ no

7. Description

Condition
☐ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair
☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one
☐ unaltered
☐ altered

Check one
☐ original site
☐ moved date __________

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

☐ summary paragraph
☐ completeness
☐ clarity
☐ alterations/integrity
☐ dates
☐ boundary selection
8. Significance

Period Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

☐ summary paragraph
☐ completeness
☐ clarity
☐ applicable criteria
☐ justification of areas checked
☐ relating significance to the resource
☐ context
☐ relationship of integrity to significance
☐ justification of exception
☐ other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property ___________

Quadrangle name ___________

UTM References

Verbal boundary description and justification

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national _____ state _____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title date

13. Other

☐ Maps
☐ Photographs
☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____________________________

Signed ___________________________ Date ____________________ Phone: ____________________

Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet
1. LIBERTY TOWER  
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982  
Neg. at: New York Landmarks  
Preservation Commission

View from the south
2. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View from the southeast
3. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View from the northeast
4. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks Preservation Commission

Detail, Liberty Street facade and rooftop
5. LIBERTY TOWER
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Detail, Liberty Street facade