

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

For NPS use only

received AUG 8 1984

date entered SEP 7 1984

1. Name

historic Film Center Building

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 630 Ninth Avenue not for publication

city, town New York vicinity of congressional district

state New York code 036 county New York code 061

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
☐ district	☐ public	☒ occupied	☐ agriculture	☐ museum
☒ building(s)	☒ private	☐ unoccupied	☒ commercial	☐ park
☐ structure	☐ both	☐ work in progress	☐ educational	☐ private residence
☐ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	☐ entertainment	☐ religious
☐ object	☐ N/A in process	☒ yes: restricted	☐ government	☐ scientific
	☐ N/A being considered	☐ yes: unrestricted	☐ industrial	☐ transportation
		☐ no	☐ military	☐ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Edwin A. Malloy

street & number 551 Fifth Avenue

city, town New York vicinity of state New York 10017

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 New York 10007

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

(LP-1220)

title Landmarks Preservation Commission has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date November 9, 1982 ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☒ local

depository for survey records New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

city, town 20 Vesey Street, N.Y.C. state New York 10007

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Film Center Building is a thirteen-story-high office building that covers the entire frontage from West 44th to West 45th Streets on the east side of Ninth Avenue. Built of steel-frame construction, the facades are clad in brown brick. The first floor has marble piers, surmounted by white stone on the second floor. The Ninth Avenue facade is eleven bays wide, while the side facades have five bays. Little of the rear facade is visible. The majority of the bays contain four three-over-three double-hung sash windows with vertical lights. Decorative elements include brickwork spandrels, grooved belt courses above the tenth and twelfth floors, a wide grooved coping with modernistic decorative forms and vertical masonry strips on the upper floors. The treatment of the end bays is different from that of the center bays. With a greater expanse of brick and fewer windows, they appear to be solid masonry piers. The end bays have two three-over-three double-hung sash windows and only the upper floors have decorative spandrels. The entire second floor has grooved ornamentation.

The entrance on Ninth Avenue has three glazed doors surmounted by grooved lintels, and a transom with abstract floral forms. The stepped entry surround is decorated with bands and geometric motifs. On the fascia "FILM CENTER" is affixed in metal letters. This entrance leads into the rectangular-shaped outer vestibule. The vestibule is dominated by an elaborate ornamental plaster band that runs across the ceiling and down either side wall as a stepped upside-down triangle. The band is composed of horizontal and vertical elements in varying relief; the effect is that of a modernistic woven plaster tapestry. At the base of each side wall is a vent covered by handsome cast-metal grilles in a geometric design of horizontals and verticals (a similar vent is in the smaller vestibule at the West 44th Street entrance). The ceiling in the outer vestibule is painted white, as are the other ceilings throughout the ground floor interior; it is unclear whether or not this was Kahn's intention.

A second set of doors, on axis with the first, leads into the lobby proper. As in the outer vestibule, the ceiling is articulated with a geometric pattern of horizontal and vertical bands that extends onto the side walls. The gray walls complement the muted polychromy of the floor, which has a tile pattern of pink, ochre, and gray geometric shapes. The colors and shapes used in the floor pattern lend a strong directional quality to the space, leading to the elevator bays that lie on axis ahead. The walls in the elevator bay area are banded with broad, horizontal stripes of alternating light and dark stone. The modernistic design is carried through to the elevator doors and to the adjacent directory board and mail box. These are all particularly striking details of the interior space, defined by horizontal and vertical bands. A limited amount of color is used on the directory board, accentuating its appearance. The elevator doors have been painted in spots for the purposes of highlighting, and not all the elevator cabs survive in their original condition. The narrow walls at the junction of the main lobby with the narrower elevator lobby are each adorned with a modernistic projecting relief suggestive of a movie camera. Next to them, at the corners, were originally seven projecting red marble cylinder ends, two of which have been removed on the north, and one on the south.

The polychromatic mosaic on the far wall of the elevator lobby, perpendicular to the cabs, is striking both for its use of color, mostly blue, orange, yellow, and red, and for its play against the other geometric patterns found throughout the interior. While the mosaic is made up of horizontals and verticals, it does not have the strictly uniform

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National Park Service**

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Film Center Building,
Continuation sheet New York County, N.Y.

Item number 7

Page 2

and precise angles found throughout the rest of the interior; it is a more relaxed and seemingly spontaneous composition. A triangular ceiling projection in the elevator bay partially obscures the mosaic; it is unclear if this was original to the design. This triangular projection is in keeping with the ziggurat-like form that extends over the directory board in the lobby.

From this main lobby, a wide straight hallway leads south. On its east side, just beyond the lobby, is a smaller hall and a staircase. The green staircase wall is articulated by a handsome vertical arrangement of red marble cylinders, adding color and variety to a secondary space. The arrangement of marble cylinders in the wall is similar to those used in the north wall near the directory board in the lobby; both give their respective walls a sense of three-dimensionality.

The hallway turns at a 45 degree angle to the southeast, and continues for several yards before another 45 degree angle to the south, leading to the West 44th Street entrance. This entrance is considerably smaller than that at the Ninth Avenue side of the building and was clearly intended to be a secondary entrance to the building. Its ceiling repeats the plaster ornamentation found in the Ninth Avenue entrance vestibule.

Storefronts are located on the ground floor. There have been no significant changes to the exterior of the building.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
☐ prehistoric	☐ archeology-prehistoric	☐ community planning	☐ landscape architecture	☐ religion
☐ 1400–1499	☐ archeology-historic	☐ conservation	☐ law	☐ science
☐ 1500–1599	☐ agriculture	☐ economics	☐ literature	☐ sculpture
☐ 1600–1699	☒ architecture	☐ education	☐ military	☐ social/humanitarian
☐ 1700–1799	☐ art	☐ engineering	☐ music	☐ theater
☐ 1800–1899	☐ commerce	☐ exploration/settlement	☐ philosophy	☐ transportation
☒ 1900–	☐ communications	☐ industry	☐ politics/government	☐ other (specify)
		☐ invention		

Specific dates 1928–29 **Builder/Architect** Ely Jacques Kahn

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Film Center Building, built in 1928–29 and a handsome essay in the Art Deco style, has one of New York's finest surviving Art Deco interiors. It was designed by Ely Jacques Kahn, who was one of the city's most prominent architects working in modernist styles. Kahn's interior designs are among his most striking and important creations. Kahn developed a highly individual interpretation of the Art Deco style characterized by the design of walls and ceilings as woven plaster tapestries and the polychromatic treatment of various elements. This approach is exemplified in the interior of the Film Center Building. The structure was built as a support facility for the production of motion pictures and still serves that industry.

In the 1910s and 1920s the new motion picture industry moved into the area of Times Square and the blocks east and west of Broadway. With so much of the motion picture industry concentrated in the area, it was not surprising that support services would locate nearby, in the less expensive section west of Eighth Avenue. The Film Center Building was built by the Film Center, Inc., in the same neighborhood as the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, the Paramount Pictures Office and Film Exchange, and the Warner Brothers Vitaphone Building. Ten years after its completion, the Film Center Building housed over seventy film distributors who sent films to theaters all over the city.

Ely Jacques Kahn (1884–1972) was a prominent 20th-century New York architect whose career spanned fifty years. His work included loft buildings (especially in the garment and printing districts), hospitals, restaurants, houses, office buildings, country clubs, warehouses, apartment buildings, specialty shops, factories, and department stores. Over the years, Kahn worked in a variety of styles; he was best known, however, for his modernistic Art Deco work in the 1920s and 1930s. In this period he established himself as one of the most prominent New York architects working in the Art Deco style, alongside his colleagues Raymond Hood, Joseph Urban, and Ralph Walker.

The term "Art Deco," adapted from the name of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs held in Paris in 1925, is today used loosely to describe a number of architectural and decorative styles current in Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere from the early 1920s until as late, in some instances, as the mid-1940s.¹ In American architecture, the style was first popularized in designs for skyscrapers in New York and, shortly thereafter, became popular for apartment houses, resort hotels, restaurants, and movie theaters throughout the country. In the skyscrapers, Art Deco design emphasized verticality, design by massing, polychromy, and modernistic ornament based on abstract floral or geometric patterns; these general characteristics then spread to other building types.

A hallmark of the Art Deco skyscrapers was the elaborate treatment given to the entrance lobbies. Dramatically lit and highly decorative, lobbies became a major component of most such structures, and the ornamental design was carried down to the smallest details, including radiator grilles, mail boxes, and elevator doors. For the Chrysler

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Central Park, N.Y.-N.J.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

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5	8	5	1	2	0
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4	5	1	2	3	7	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property occupies Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1035, Lot 1 as outlined on the attached map with a scale of 1"= 120'.

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

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Contact: Merrill Hesch

organization Historic Preservation Field

Services Bureau

date July 1983

street & number Agency 1, E.S.P.

telephone (518) 474-0479

city or town New York,

state N.Y. 12238

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation

date 7/35/84

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the
National Register

date 9-7-84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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date entered

Continuation sheet Film Center Building
New York County, N.Y.

Item number 8

Page 2

Building (1928), William Van Alen designed a triangular-shaped lobby faced with marble and nickel-chrome steel, lit indirectly; ceiling paintings depicted the history of transportation.² At the Daily News Building (1930-31), Raymond Hood saved the most dramatic decorative effects for the main lobby (now altered), composed of an enormous hemisphere of black faceted glass suspended over a rotating globe.

Kahn enthusiastically embraced the Art Deco style and helped promote and develop its vocabulary in the city. His commissions tended to be for smaller and less conspicuous buildings than the major skyscrapers and their exteriors are sometimes plain, but their lobbies are elaborately decorative. Kahn's interior designs are among his most striking and important creations.

Kahn's involvement with the Art Deco style included both architecture and decorative arts. The 1925 Paris Exposition sparked a growing interest in design and in the decorative arts and the modern aesthetic, and Kahn became an active participant. He was directly involved in the 1928 exhibition of modern furnishings at Lord & Taylor, based on the store's purchases at the Paris Show,³ and later that year he was asked, along with Raymond Hood, Ralph Walker, Eliel Saarinen, John Root, and Eugene Schoen, to work on an exhibition of modern interiors and furnishings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁴ Kahn was directly involved in the design of fabrics, mosaics, furniture, and glass and metal craft. He was particularly interested in textile design.

Much of Kahn's architectural thought was influenced by his interest in the decorative arts, particularly his notions about color and ornament. In a 1929 essay, "On Decoration and Ornament," he wrote:

The new attitude in design proceeds to consider decoration from a new angle. Decoration is not necessarily ornament. The interest of an object has primarily to do with its shape, proportion and color. The texture of its surface, the rhythms of the elements that break that surface either into planes or distinct areas of contrasting interest, becomes ornament.⁵

Kahn provided "texture" to his buildings by treating walls like woven fabric, an effect that became fairly common in Art Deco buildings. The idea that walls should be designed in the manner of textiles has been traced back to the German architect Gottfried Semper (1803-1879), who included as one of the four basic components of architecture the "enclosure of textiles, animal skins, wattle or any other filler hung from the frame or placed between the supporting poles."⁶

Kahn's interest in color stemmed in large part from his early training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in painting: "Whatever my enthusiasm for architecture per se appeared to be, I had from my early years - never forgotten the original desire to concentrate on painting."⁷ Color and its relationship to architectural space was a prime concern for him; his approach

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National Park Service

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

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date entered

Continuation sheet Film Center Building
New York County, N.Y. Item number 8 Page 3

was to treat "color as part of a structure and not merely as applied ornament."⁸ Leon Solon, a friend and colleague, shared this interest in color, published theoretical writings on the subject, and worked with Kahn on various projects. Together they tried to recreate what they thought were the original "Greek primary colors."⁹

The combination of Kahn's ideas about color, textiles, and ornamentation produced a very individualistic version of Art Deco design. In his principal buildings in the style -- No. 2 Park Avenue (1927), No. 261 Fifth Avenue (1928-29), and the Film Center Building -- as well as in his elaborately conceived work in the garment district -- Bricken Textile Building (1441 Broadway; 1929) -- he treated all the exterior walls as a surface composed of color and of abstract vertical and horizontal lines in low relief. The effect is very much that of a woven wall, and it is difficult to distinguish the ornament from the wall itself. This treatment was, in turn, carried on into the lobby spaces.

Despite the great loss of Art Deco interiors over the past fifty years, the Film Center lobby has managed to survive, largely intact. One of the finest remaining interior designs of Ely Jacques Kahn, who was one of New York's most prominent practitioners of the Art Deco style, it exemplifies all the traits which made this one of the most unusual and striking interpretations of modernist design. Its decoration still adorns a building serving the movie industry once centered in nearby Times Square, and its lobby remains one of the city's best Art Deco interiors.

Footnotes

1. Although the range of modernistic, non-historicist styles included under the term has sometimes been divided into subgroups, including Art Deco, Style Moderne, Modernistic, Streamlined, PWA-Moderne, Zig-Zag Moderne, Resort Moderne, and presumably others, and although the use of the term to denote architectural style of any kind has been questioned by some historians, it remains a convenient name to apply to the products of a relatively limited time-span which are associated with notions of progress, industrial design, and the "Machine Age." For a general discussion of the style in New York, see Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
2. The Chrysler Building is a National Historic Landmark (1976).
3. Kahn discusses this exhibition in his Autobiography, Chapter V, p.11.
4. Ibid.

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

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Continuation sheet Film Center Building
New York County, N.Y.

Item number 8

Page 4

5. See Kahn's essay, "On Decoration and Ornament," originally published 1929 and reprinted in Otto John Teegan, Contemporary American Architects: Ely Jacques Kahn (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1931).
6. Robinson and Bletter, p.61, also discuss Semper.
7. See Kahn's Autobiography, Chapter II, p.31.
8. Kahn makes this point in a 1928 essay, "On the Use of Color," reprinted in Teegan, p.23.
9. For Kahn on Solon, see his Autobiography, Chapter II, p. 4.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Film Center Building

Continuation sheet New York County, N.Y.

Item number 9

Page 2

Bibliography

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Kahn, Ely Jacques. "Autobiography." Unpublished typescript. Drawings Collection, Avery Library, Columbia University, c. 1972.

Kilham, Walter H. Raymond Hood, Architect. Form Through Function in the American Skyscraper. New York: Architectural Book Co., 1973.

Landmarks Preservation Commission. "Architects Appendix." Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (LP-1051), 1981, p.1198.

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Robinson, Cervin and Rosemarie Haag Bletter. Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Teegen, Otto, John. Ely Jacques Kahn. (Contemporary American Architects). New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1931.

70

NINTH

AVE.

W. 47TH

W. 46TH

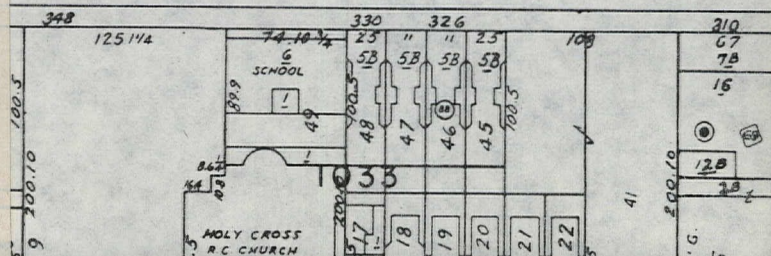
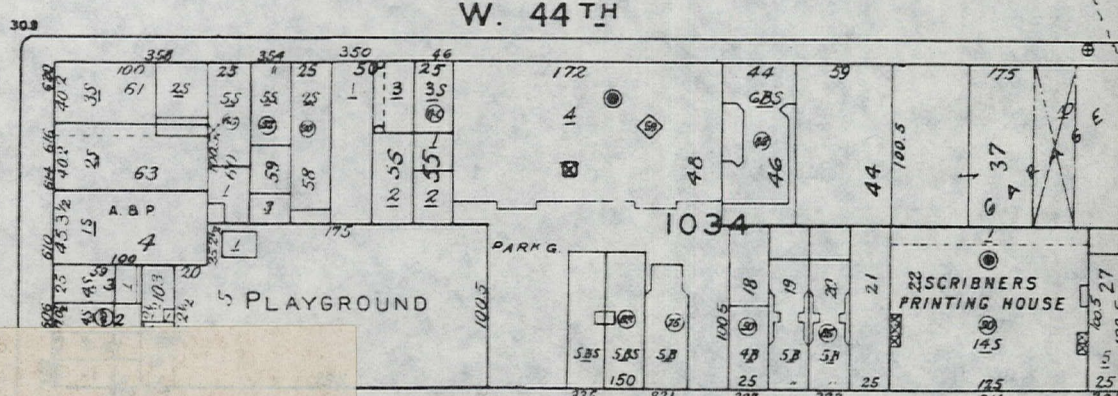
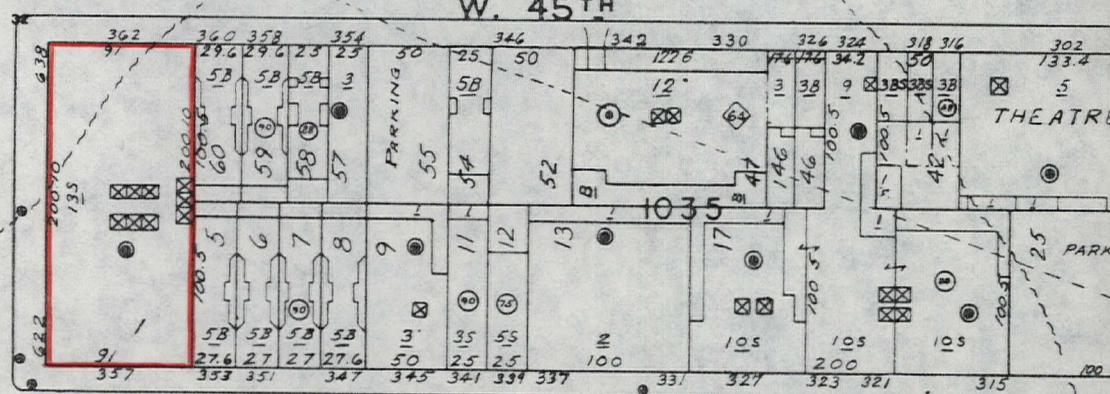
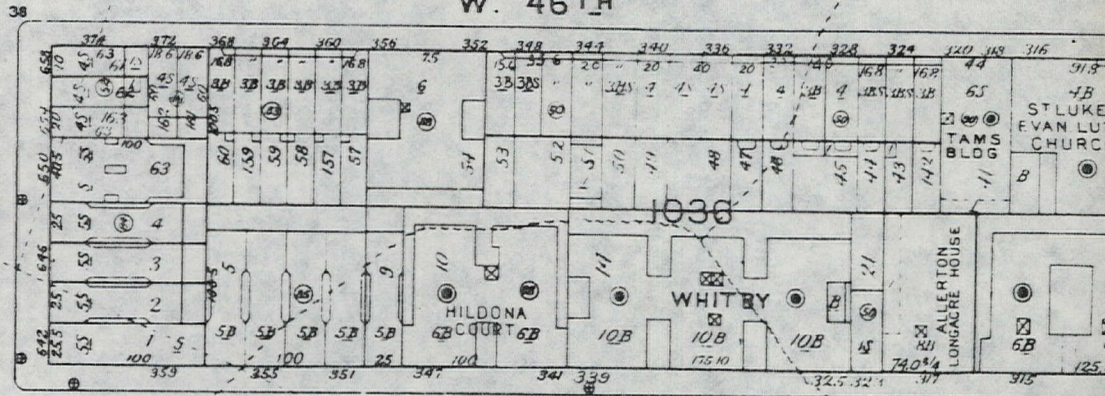
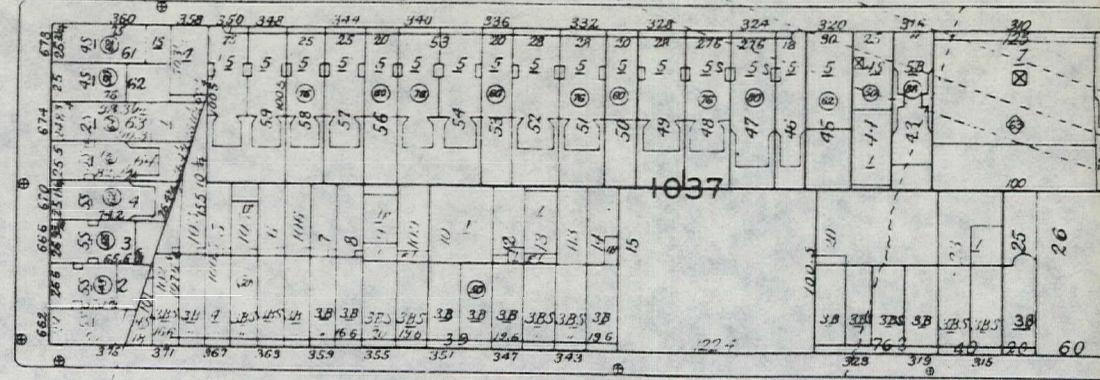
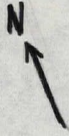
W. 45TH

W. 44TH

W. 43RD

FILM CENTER BUILDING
630 Ninth Avenue
New York County, New York
Manhattan Land Book, Plate 71
Miami: Real Estate Data, Inc., 1981

Scale: 1" = 120'



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Film Center Building
New York County
NEW YORK

AUG 8 1984

Working No. _____

Fed. Reg. Date: 7-5-86

Date Due: 9-6-84 / 9-22-84

Action: ACCEPT 9-7-84

RETURN

REJECT

Federal Agency: _____

Entered in the
National Register

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

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

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____

Reviewer _____

Discipline _____

Date _____

_____ see continuation sheet

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

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership Public Acquisition	Status Accessible	Present Use
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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

FILED
NEW YORK COUNTY
NEW YORK

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: _____



1. Film Center Building
630 Ninth Avenue
New York County, New York NY
Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

View east



2. Film Center Building
630 Ninth Avenue
New York County, New York, NY
Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission
View south

FILM CENTER



3. Film Center Building
630 Ninth Avenue
New York County, New York NY
Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Entrance



4. Film Center Building
630 Ninth Avenue
New York County, New York , NY
Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. #: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission
Interior, lobby



5. Film Center Building
630 Ninth Avenue
New York County, New York, NY
Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982
Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Interior, lobby



6. Film Center Building

630 Ninth Avenue

New York County, New York NY

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1982

Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

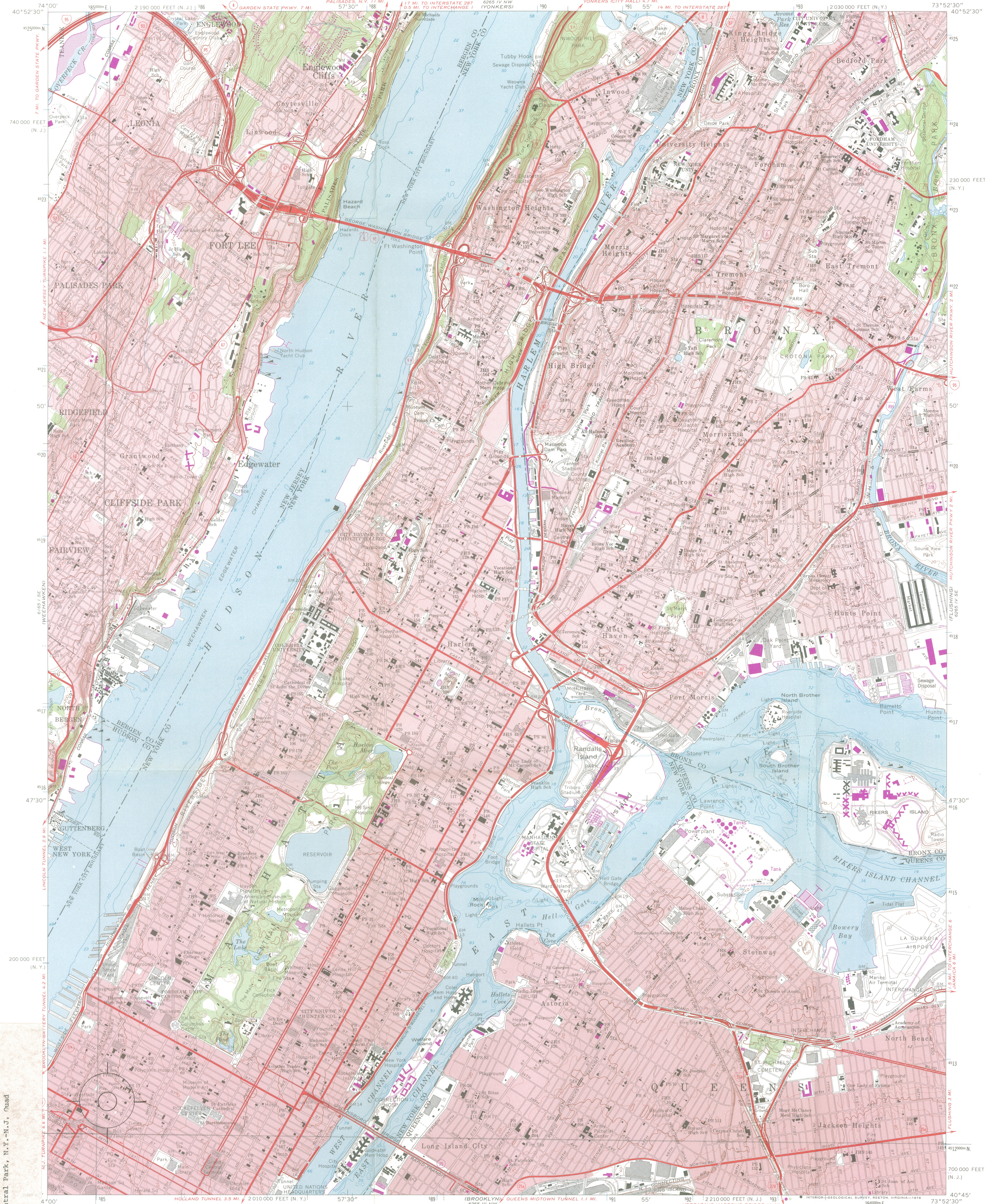
Interior, lobby

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



CENTRAL PARK QUADRANGLE
NEW YORK - NEW JERSEY
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)
SW/4 HARLEM 15' QUADRANGLE

686 IV NE
(MOUNT VERNON)



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Revised in cooperation with New York
Department of Transportation

Control by USGS, USC&GS, and New Jersey Geodetic Survey

Planimetry by photogrammetric methods and from USC&GS Charts T-4567,
T-5089, T-5278, T-5448, T-5449, T-5451, T-5452, T-5453, T-5458,
and T-5778. Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1954 and planimetric surveys 1956

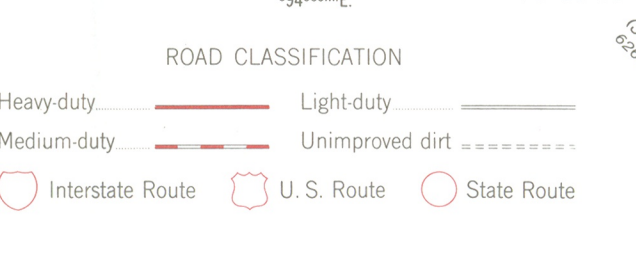
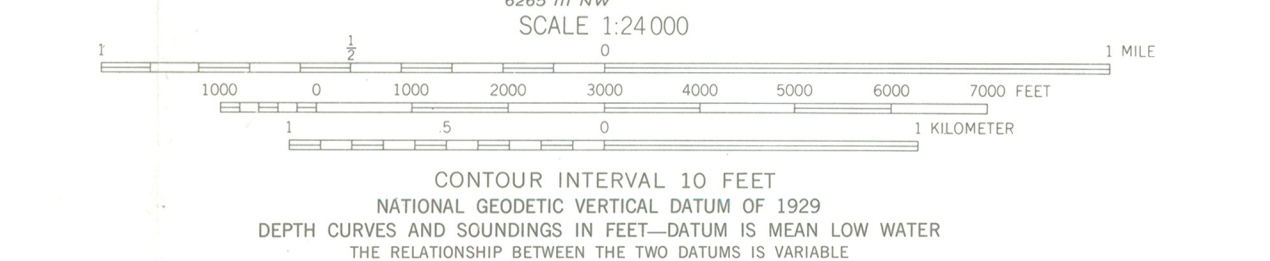
Revised from aerial photographs taken 1966. Field checked 1966

Selected hydrographic data compiled from USC&GS Charts 226, 274, 745,
746, and 747 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes

Polycyclic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grids based on New York coordinate system, Long Island zone,
and New Jersey coordinate system

1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown



CENTRAL PARK, N.Y. - N.J.
SW/4 HARLEM 15' QUADRANGLE
N4045-W7352.5/7.5

1966
PHOTOREVISED 1979
AMS 6265 IV SW-SERIES V821

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs
taken 1977 and other source data. This information
not field checked. Map edited 1979

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

FILM CENTER BUILDING
630 Ninth Avenue
New York County, New York
UTM Reference:
16/ 585120/ 4512370

Central Park, N.Y. - N.J. Quad