

Landmarks Preservation Commission
March 15, 2005, Designation List 359
LP-2170

A. I. NAMM & SON DEPARTMENT STORE, 450-458 Fulton Street (aka 1-7 Hoyt Street), Brooklyn. Built 1924-25 and 1928-29; Robert D. Kohn and Charles Butler, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 157, Lot 9.

On November 16, 2004, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the A.I. Namm & Son Department Store and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the Brooklyn Heights Association, Fort Greene Association, Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development, Municipal Art Society, Historic Districts Council, and New York Landmarks Conservancy. Representatives of the Downtown Brooklyn Council and Fulton Mall Improvement Association requested that the Commission delay action on this item. In addition, the Commission has received several letters in support of designation, including those from Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, City Councilmembers David Yassky and Letitia James, Brooklyn Community Board 2, Brooklyn Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and Boerum Hill Association.

Summary

The A.I. Namm & Son Department Store building at 450-458 Fulton Street is the sole surviving portion of the important enterprise that once covered nearly one entire block, and despite the alteration of its base, remains a significant architectural and commercial feature of downtown Brooklyn. Adolph I. Namm was a Polish immigrant who transferred his Manhattan upholstery and embroidery trimmings business to Brooklyn in 1885. He opened a new store in 1891 at No. 452 on the stretch of upper Fulton Street that was becoming Brooklyn's commercial nucleus. Namm's business expanded into a highly successful department store that made him quite wealthy. Benjamin Harrison Namm, his son, succeeded in running the firm, which became A.I. Namm & Son. By the 1920s, Namm's was one of the largest such American stores, in competition in Brooklyn with Abraham & Straus. This structure, Namm's last architectural phase, was built in 1924-25 and 1928-29 to the design of architects Robert D. Kohn and Charles Butler, and consists of a structural steel frame with reinforced concrete floors, clad in Indiana limestone with bronze trim. The highly sophisticated, elegant modern design, with a rounded corner, contrasts monumental sculptural masonry piers, vertical window bays, and decorative bronze spandrel panels. The design was undoubtedly by Kohn, one of the few American architects who had produced aesthetically noteworthy and interesting work (c. 1905-15) influenced by the Vienna Secession. He explored a different modern aesthetic in the 1920s, a period when American architects were searching for modern architectural forms through various avenues. In 1957, this Fulton Street property, then Namm-Loeser's Department Store, was purchased by the parent firm of Abraham & Straus and adapted for offices and stores.



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DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

A.I. Namm & Son¹

Adolph I. Namm (1856-1920), born in Posen, Prussia (formerly and currently Poznan, Poland), immigrated to New York City around 1870. An Adolph Namm appears in city directories in 1877-79 as a dealer in frames on Eighth Avenue. A later newspaper article referred to Namm's initial business as shades, screens, upholstery, and floor coverings.² By 1882, he was listed with a trimmings concern on Sixth Avenue in the Ladies' Mile shopping district, apparently continuing a family business. He transferred his enterprise to Brooklyn in 1885, relocating to No. 286 Fulton Street, about two blocks north of City Hall.³ An advertisement in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* called Namm a "dealer and manufacturer of upholstery and embroidery trimmings."⁴ By 1887, Namm had expanded to the upper three stories of 335-337 Fulton Street (aka 310-312 Washington Street). As reported in the *New York Times*, he was arrested in 1888 for "selling mats made by convict laborers, and failing to label them properly."⁵ The Fulton Street building that Namm rented burned to the ground (in a fire of undetermined cause) in December 1890. Though Namm estimated his loss in draperies, embroidery, and other stock to be about \$50,000, it was reported that he expected to be reimbursed through insurance. The *Times* noted at that time that

*a few weeks ago Mr. Namm leased the lot at Hoyt and Fulton Streets for \$10,000 for ten years, and started to erect a store to cost \$60,000. He already has three stores, but he proposed to consolidate his business in this new building.*⁶

An advertisement for a sale at Namm's in March 1891 indicated that it was for "a short time only at the old store, prior to removal to our new building."⁷

Namm's new store at 452 Fulton Street, located between Hoyt Street and Elm Place, carried merchandise similar to the previous ones. It was eventually expanded into a highly successful dry goods store with 80 departments, and the business made A.I. Namm quite wealthy. He "always gave credit to his wife [Cecelia Meyers Namm]... for having been his strongest influence in building up the establishment from its beginning."⁸ Due to poor health, though, Namm retired from active participation in the store in 1910. His son, Benjamin Harrison Namm (1888-1969), succeeded in running the firm, which became A.I. Namm & Son. B.H. Namm, who became president of the company in 1916, had studied at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, began as a stock clerk in his father's store, and served in the Corps of Engineers and other divisions during World War I, becoming a major. He was a president of the National Retail Dry Goods Association (1945-46) and was active in Brooklyn civic causes, including the Brooklyn Federation of Jewish Charities. His favorite sales motto was "Don't sell America short -- sell it shirts."⁹ B.H. Namm's brother-in-law, Edgar Allen Baum, joined the firm as vice president.

Between 1890 and 1940, the Namm establishment purchased most of the block on which its store was situated, except for several properties (Nos. 462-470) on the eastern end of the Fulton Street blockfront.¹⁰ In 1909, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* indicated that "in the Namm building are six stores, and it is planned to add four more on the corner of Livingston and Hoyt streets before the season is very far advanced."¹¹ A new eight-story extension was constructed here in 1912 to the design of architect William Higginson. To the east of this, a half-million-dollar six-story extension by Charles A.P. Jehle, of Jehle Engineering Co., was built in 1919-21.

Fulton Street in Downtown Brooklyn

Fulton Street, one of the oldest thoroughfares in Brooklyn, traces its origin to a Native American trail later used by European settlers. By 1809, it was known as the Brooklyn and Jamaica Turnpike, a toll road that extended into Queens. The northern terminus of Fulton Street was just southwest of where the Brooklyn Bridge was constructed, and the street extended in a southerly direction (this section was later replaced by Cadman Plaza), then turned sharply southeasterly by City Hall. During much of the 19th century, "lower" Fulton Street, between the Fulton Ferry waterfront and City Hall, was the commercial nucleus of Brooklyn. The blocks of "upper" Fulton Street east of City Hall developed as one of the earlier residential neighborhoods of downtown Brooklyn, after the city's incorporation in 1834.¹² By 1860, Brooklyn had become the third largest American city (after New York and Philadelphia), resulting from substantial European immigration and the 1855 merger of the Cities of Brooklyn and Williamsburgh with the Town of Flatbush. Downtown Brooklyn started changing with the increase in commerce after the Civil War.

The opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 and the great increase in traffic, which was routed along lower Fulton Street, occasioned Brooklyn's commercial core to shift to upper Fulton Street. Transportation improvements accelerated this trend, including Long Island Railroad service to Flatbush Avenue in 1877, completion of construction of the elevated railway to Hoyt Street in 1888, and the opening of an IRT subway station at Hoyt Street in 1908. Redevelopment of the area occurred with commercial businesses, theaters, hotels,

and offices. Among these were the Abraham & Straus Department Store (1883) at No. 420; Frederick Loeser & Co. Department Store at No. 484 (1887); Offerman Building (1890-93, Peter J. Lauritzen) at No. 503-513; Gage & Tollner restaurant (1892) at No. 372; and Dime Savings Bank (1906-08, Mowbray & Uffinger; 1931-32, Halsey, McCormack & Helmer), 9 DeKalb Avenue.¹³ Later subway openings that provided further accessibility to the vicinity were BMT service to DeKalb Avenue in 1915, and IND service to Jay Street/Borough Hall in 1933. Fulton Street's importance to Brooklyn was indicated by the W.P.A.'s *New York City Guide* in 1939:

as the city developed into a great metropolis, downtown Fulton Street became the concentration point of subways, street cars, and elevated lines, attracted important public buildings and leading commercial and recreational establishments, and assumed a bustling Main Street air... From Smith Street to Flatbush Avenue, Fulton Street hums by day with an endless procession of shoppers; the department stores, Abraham and Straus, Namm's, and Frederick Loeser and Company, offer as magnificent an array of merchandise as those in Manhattan; and such is the attraction of the Brooklyn market, which is heavily patronized by Long Islanders, that many large Manhattan shops have found it expedient to open branches on Fulton Street.¹⁴

1920s Additions to the A.I. Namm & Son Department Store¹⁵

By 1923, A.I. Namm & Son was listed by the Manufacturer's Trust Co. as the "third largest cash department store in the United States,"¹⁶ meaning that the firm only accepted cash (instead of charge accounts). Namm's major competition for retail domination of Brooklyn at the time was Abraham & Straus. The Namm store announced plans in January 1924 to demolish its original building at 452 Fulton Street and to construct a new nine-story-plus-basement fireproof addition, to the design of architects Robert D. Kohn and Charles Butler. The *Times* reported that

This will be the first step in a building operation which will greatly enlarge and improve the present store. The first operation will more than double the store's Fulton Street frontage and add about 65,000 square feet of space to the present accommodations for Brooklyn shoppers. It will also be a significant architectural ornament to Brooklyn's principal thoroughfare and add a new peak to the skyline. The structure will be carried out in a modern American style. The materials will be stone and bronze to the third floor, and thereafter stone, with buff brick fillings.¹⁷

Major exterior construction was completed in October 1924, though interior work continued until the store's official opening in February 1925. The Thompson-Starrett Co. was the builder. Actually eight stories, the Namm addition was constructed of structural steel with reinforced concrete floors above concrete foundations, and clad in "white oolitic Indiana limestone"¹⁸ with bronze spandrel panels and trim. Then considered the tallest department store in Brooklyn, the structure, with a 90-foot Fulton Street frontage, contained a subway entrance and Namm Bargain Basement; large first- and second-story show windows; six selling floors; accounting and financial control offices on the seventh story; and additional departments and a recreation hall for executives on the eighth story.

A.I. Namm & Son next planned to construct a 15-story tower behind the new Fulton Street addition (this tower was never built). Namm's sold its warehouse property on the block to the south of the store (once the site of a planned expansion) for \$649,000 in February 1925. The firm reported sales of \$17.46 million and profits of \$1.234 million in January 1925, and sales of \$17 million and profits of \$1.104 million in January 1927.¹⁹ In June 1928, the company announced plans to construct an eight-story annex to the 1924-25 addition, on the corner of Fulton and Hoyt Streets, also to the design of Kohn and Butler. This site, occupied by the Sorosis Shoe Co. for some 25 years, had finally been obtained. The Namm annex was of similar design, construction, and materials as the 1924-25 addition, with a rounded corner, and increased the Fulton Street frontage by 22-1/2 feet, as well as 71 feet on Hoyt Street, and extended the store's total capacity to 500,000 square feet of space. The annex was completed by November 1929. (No evidence has been uncovered as to the builder, but it was likely the Thompson-Starrett Co. again).

Namm's 1920s expansion was just one part of the overall redevelopment of Fulton Street. Lewis H. Pounds, president of the Brooklyn Real Estate Board, commented in 1929 that

The shopping centre of Fulton Street is undergoing a decided change. Already many of the older buildings are being vacated so that they may be torn down. More reconstruction work will follow as the new subway lines are advanced. Once the Fulton Street elevated structure is demolished all of Fulton Street will be changed.²⁰

Among the other new structures were an addition to the Abraham & Straus Department Store (1929, Starrett & Van Vleck), 420 Fulton Street. The great increase in property values here was noted by the *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide*, which listed the assessed land value of Loeser & Co.'s property as \$1.6 million in 1921, rising to \$3.1 million in 1928.²¹

The Architects²²

Robert David Kohn (1870-1953), born in Manhattan, graduated from the College of the City of New York (1886) and Columbia University (1890), then attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1891-95). Upon his return to New York, Kohn worked for a number of architectural firms before establishing his own independent practice in 1896. Among his early commissions were town houses designed in an abstracted Beaux-Arts style, including 352-353 Riverside Drive (1899-1901); River Mansion, 337 Riverside Drive, and the neighboring 322 West 106th Street (1900-02); and 46 East 74th Street (1901-02).²³ Kohn was associate architect, with Carrère & Hastings, of the abstracted neo-Renaissance style New York Society for Ethical Culture School (1902-04), 33 Central Park West²⁴ (Kohn was a close personal friend of Dr. Felix Adler, the founder (1876) of the Society, and was a member and, later, president, of the congregation). Kohn's practice came to encompass warehouses, factories, and residential, commercial, office, and institutional buildings. He emerged as one of the few American architects (like Emery Roth in his early career) who produced major designs influenced by the Vienna Secession, between about 1905 and 1915. These works, all aesthetically noteworthy and among Kohn's most interesting work, included the Seaman Bros. warehouse (1905), 131-133 Perry Street; Hermitage Hotel (1905-07; demolished), 592 Seventh Avenue, a bachelor apartment hotel; New York Evening Post Building (1906), 20 Vesey Street; H. Black & Co. clothing factory (1907), Cleveland; Spero Building (1907-08), 19-27 West 21st Street, a store-and-loft structure for a wholesale millinery goods firm; New York Society for Ethical Culture (1909-10), 2 West 64th Street;²⁵ and Lindner Coy Store (1915), for women's clothing, Cleveland. Kohn was married in 1905 to the sculptress Estelle Rumbold, who collaborated on the Evening Post and Ethical Culture projects.

Kohn later explored a different modern aesthetic that sometimes referenced his earlier Secessionist influence, and presaged or paralleled such stylistic trends as modern Classicism and Art Deco. He designed the 11-story Auerbach & Sons factory (1915), 628-644 11th Avenue, which features vertical articulation, wide horizontal windows, and stylized geometric ornament; a 12-story loft building at 99-103 East 19th Street (aka 235 Park Avenue South) (1920-21); the 11-story R.H. Macy & Co. warehouse (c. 1922; demolished), 418-422 11th Avenue; and additions to the R.H. Macy & Co. Department Store (1922-31), Seventh Avenue and West 34th Street.²⁶ Kohn was a founder (1921) and president (1929) of the New York Building Congress and served as president of the American Institute of Architects (1930-32), director of the housing division of the Public Works Administration (1933-34), and vice president of the New York World's Fair (1939-40), as well as a member of the fair's board of design. He received the medal of honor in 1933 from the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Certain of his commissions were executed under the firm name of Robert D. Kohn & Associates.

Charles Butler (1870-1953), born in Scarsdale, N.Y., graduated from Columbia College (1891), then attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. In 1899, he formed a partnership with Benjamin Wistar Morris, Jr., and Cary Seldon Rodman, which became Butler & Rodman around 1901 (and Butler, Rodman & [Marshal F.] Oliver briefly in 1905). The firm of Butler & Rodman, which continued after Rodman's death in 1911, was listed in directories to around 1925. Butler became known as a hospital specialist, one of his works being the Children's Hospital (1909) of Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore. He also participated in the design of the Interior Department Building (1915-17), Washington, D.C., with the Office of the Supervising Architect.²⁷ Butler's office address after 1917 was the same as Robert D. Kohn's, and he apparently formed a partnership with Kohn that lasted, informally and formally, to at least 1952. Butler was also one of the design consultants for the New York World's Fair.

Kohn and Butler's collaborations were variously listed under the firm names of Robert D. Kohn and Charles Butler, Associated; Kohn & Butler; and Robert D. Kohn, Charles Butler & Associates. They entered the competition for the design of the Nebraska State Capitol in 1919. Aside from the A.I. Namm & Son Department Store (1924-25, 1928-29), they were responsible for the 12-story Dorothy Gray Building (1928), 683 Fifth Avenue, which received a silver medal from the Fifth Avenue Association in 1929; buildings for Montefiore Hospital; the Nurses' Home and Training School (1927) and a building for patients of moderate income (1930-31), Mt. Sinai Hospital; and Welfare Hospital for Chronic Diseases (1939), Welfare Island. Kohn and/or Butler joined with Clarence S. Stein on a number of projects. Stein (1883-1975), born in Rochester, N.Y., trained as an architect at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts (1908-11) and entered the office of Bertram G. Goodhue, where he became chief designer. Stein became best known as a pioneering planner, with Henry Wright, of housing projects and planned communities, including Sunnyside Gardens (1924-28), Queens, and Radburn, N.J. (1928-32), for which Kohn was one of the architectural consultants. Among the collaborations of Kohn, Butler and Stein were: Parkwest Hospital

(1925-26, Butler and Stein), 168-170 West 76th Street;²⁸ Fieldston School buildings (1927-28, Kohn and Stein), operated by the Ethical Culture Society in Riverdale, the Bronx; Temple Emanu-El (1927-29, Kohn, Butler and Stein, with Mayers, Murray & Phillip), 840 Fifth Avenue;²⁹ and Fort Greene Houses (1942-44, Butler and Stein, with numerous other architects), Brooklyn.

Thompson-Starrett Co., Builders³⁰

The Thompson-Starrett Construction Co. was founded in 1901 by Theodore, Ralph, and William (and later Goldwin) Starrett. The Starretts were four of the five brothers who became associated with large construction and architectural firms based in New York and Chicago. Originally from Kansas, the Starrett family moved to the Chicago area. Eldest brothers Theodore and Paul began their careers in 1887 in the office of architect Daniel H. Burnham. Theodore Starrett (1865-1917) became a structural engineer and a prominent designer of Chicago hotels and apartment buildings, and formed the Whitney-Starrett Co., which built Union Station (1897, Burnham; demolished), Columbus, Ohio. The subsequent Thompson-Starrett Co. specialized in large-scale industrial, commercial, hotel, and skyscraper construction. The firm's many projects included Union Station (1903-08, D.H. Burnham & Co.), Washington, D.C.; and, in New York City, the St. Regis Hotel (1901-04, Trowbridge & Livingston), 699-703 Fifth Avenue; Municipal Building (1907-14, McKim, Mead & White), 1 Centre Street; Woolworth Building (1910-13, Cass Gilbert), 233 Broadway; Equitable Building (1913-15, Ernest R. Graham and Peirce Anderson), 120 Broadway; Steinway Hall (1924-25, Warren & Wetmore), 109-113 West 57th Street; and Paramount Building (1926-27, Rapp & Rapp), 1493-1501 Broadway.³¹

The Design of the 1920s Additions to the A.I. Namm & Son Department Store³²

The two 1920s additions to the Namm Department Store together represented a highly sophisticated, elegant, and coordinated modern design. The building is articulated horizontally by a tripartite division, with a two-story base (composed originally of a monumental arched main entrance on Fulton Street, large ground-story show windows, including a three-sided bay on the corner, and second-story windows originally intended to be seen from the elevated trains; now altered); a midsection with a transitional third story with individual rectangular windows, surmounted by four stories with continuous vertical window and spandrel panel bays flanked by monumental piers; and a setback terminating eighth story. The building is arranged vertically by monumental sculptural piers that rise above the terminating parapet every third bay on the Fulton Street facade and on the rounded corner, and every two bays on Hoyt Street, as well as by intermediate piers of the midsection. An interesting contrast of color is provided by the Indiana limestone and green-patinated bronze (spandrels, window frames, finials and, originally, storefronts). Discrete ornamentation, employing some historical references in an abstracted classical manner, occurs in the form of metalwork, including spandrel panels, balcony railings at the third story on Fulton Street and at the eighth story, and two finials/flagpole holders atop (above the roofline) the major piers that originally flanked the main entrance. Corinthian columns originally flanked the monumental arched main entrance (with an inset exterior vestibule); this entrance was apparently intended to evoke that of the earlier Namm store. A pedimented window still exists on the third story above the former location of the entrance.

The design was undoubtedly the work of Robert D. Kohn. It harkens back, in its vertical emphasis and abstracted sculptural forms to his earlier Secessionist-inspired works, particularly the New York Evening Post, Spero, and Lindner Coy Buildings. It also displays his continued interest in the contrast between masonry piers, window bays, and decorative metal spandrel panels, seen also in his 1920s additions to the R.H. Macy & Co. Department Store. Quite interestingly, the *New York Times* in 1924 recognized the modern aspects of the Namm building's design, calling it

*in a modern American style, reflecting the steel construction within. Emphasizing the fact that this is the tallest of Brooklyn's retail structures, and one of the tallest buildings in the boro, the vertical lines of the building have been stressed.*³³

While certain contemporary and later observers of American architecture were dismissive of its "modernism" in the first three decades of the 20th century, particularly in contrast to Europe, others have studied those trends that together forged a distinctly American modern architecture by the end of the 1920s. Among such trends were the unadorned, economical designs for many commercial and utilitarian structures, such as warehouses and "daylight" factories; and the searches for an "American style," the appropriate style or appearance for a particular building, with or without historicist references, and an appropriate architectural expression of function, especially for tall steel-framed buildings. Eliel Saarinen's widely noted second-place-winning entry in the Chicago Tribune Co.'s architectural competition of 1922 is generally considered to have marked a turning point away from

historicist styles for tall buildings. As observed in 1984 by Deborah F. Pokinski, in her published dissertation *The Development of the American Modern Style*,

*between 1922 and 1929, awakened by the unprecedented stylistic quality of Saarinen's Tribune Competition design, American architects became more attuned to the demands of modernity and increasingly conscious of the urgent need to have their architecture appear up-to-date; they became preoccupied with the question of how their newest architecture should look.*³⁴

Among the earliest New York skyscrapers that reflected this attempt at modern design were the American Radiator Building (1923-24, Raymond Hood), 40 West 40th Street, and Barclay-Vesey Building (1923-27, Ralph Walker of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin), 140 West Street.³⁵ A modern or "skyscraper" style emerged in New York in the 1920s, characterized by its vertical emphasis, sculptural massing, setbacks in response to the 1916 Zoning Resolution, and ornament subordinated to the overall mass.

Pokinski further observed that during the 1920s "Americans considered a variety of styles to be modern," and that the terms "modern" and "modernism" were used inconsistently, the former generally having a more neutral connotation, while the latter often connoted advanced or radical design.³⁶ In the 1920s, the interest in abstraction and simplification of architectural forms, and the accompanying use of blank wall surface that contrasted with concentrated areas of flat decoration, embraced such stylistic trends as modern Classicism and what was later termed Art Deco.

The Namm additions appear not to have been noted in the contemporary architectural press, nor are Robert Kohn's own observations or intentions on this project known. A few of Kohn's comments on architecture from around this period, however, may provide clues to his design for the Namm store, as well as express his explicit interest in modern American architecture. *The Western Architect* in 1919 commented of his Lindner Coy Store in Cleveland that "every one of the piers [is] deeper than it is wide, an effect of wall surface is produced in perspective, or when looking at the front laterally. Those familiar with Mr. Kohn's high buildings will recognize in this a theory upon which he has been working..." Kohn is then quoted: "The face of a building... is seen as one comes along the street and therefore should be designed for the effect upon a spectator when in that position. It is for this reason that the depth of a pier is of more importance for a greater length of time."³⁷ Before the American Institute of Architects in 1929, Kohn commented that "American civilization is expressing itself vitally in new structural forms... No one will deny that the American architect is applying these new forms more and more graciously from year to year as a creative artist, applying them with honesty to the problems of today."³⁸ And in 1932, as president of the A.I.A., he again praised the improved quality of American architectural design, but lambasted the "stupid, uninformed aping of pretended modernisms."³⁹

Later History⁴⁰

A.I. Namm & Son prospered on Fulton Street into the 1950s. The store hired architect Morris Lapidus in 1947 to design a new shoe department and its Elm Room cafeteria. In March 1952, A.I. Namm & Son acquired the name of Frederick Loeser & Co., one of Brooklyn's oldest department stores (then under liquidation) that had long occupied the entire block to the east of Namm's. Loeser's was founded by Frederick Loeser (1833-1911), a German immigrant, who first located on Fulton Street in 1860 with an embroidery and trimmings business, and moved to the latter Fulton Street location at No. 484 in 1887.⁴¹ The combined business, which became Namm-Loeser's Department Store, also included a suburban Loeser's store in Bay Shore, Long Island. Namm-Loeser's expanded further that year with acquisition of a store in Woodmere, Long Island. In February 1956, Namm-Loeser's began an arrangement in which the firm leased its Fulton Street property from the Arebec Corp., an entity established and owned by the Namm family; Arebec in turn owned some 70% of Namm-Loeser's. A large new Namm-Loeser's store was opened in a Bay Shore shopping center in 1956.

In February 1957, however, the company announced its decision to solely operate its suburban stores and to close its flagship downtown Brooklyn store due to substantial operating losses at the latter. Benjamin H. Namm cited the fact that "the company is one of the very few independent department stores in the area, and it was unable to attract the capital needed to put it on a truly competitive basis with companies operating multiple department stores."⁴² Critics among stockholders charged that the Arebec Corp. was benefitting at the expense of Namm-Loeser's. After a two-week liquidation sale, the store closed in March. The *Times* noted that this was the eighth major New York City store to close since 1952 (the others being Wanamaker's, James McCreery & Co., Lewis & Conger, Hecht Co., and Hearn's in Manhattan, and Frederick Loeser & Co. and Oppenheim Collins in Brooklyn).⁴³ Later that year, Namm-Loeser's sold its Bay Shore store to Gimbel Bros., and merged with Hughes & Hatcher, a men's clothing store in Detroit and Pittsburgh.

In August 1957, the Namm-Loeser store property on Fulton Street was purchased for \$2.85 million by Federated Department Stores of Cincinnati, owner of Abraham & Straus Department Store, located to the west of the Namm store and then the fourth largest such store in the United States. Sidney L. Solomon, president of A & S, was quoted saying “the purchase of the Namm-Loeser property is another indication of our confidence in the continuous growth of downtown Brooklyn as a shopping area.”⁴⁴ A & S announced plans in July 1958, however, to demolish all of the former A.I. Namm & Son Department Store for a 600-car garage, except for the 1924-25 and 1928-29 additions on Fulton Street, which were to be “modernized” for offices and stores. The storefronts were rented to Chock Full O’Nuts, A.S. Beck, Simco Shoes, and Albert’s Hosiery Shop. The Liberty Mutual Life Insurance Co. initially occupied four stories, while the accounting department of A & S took the top three stories. The property was purchased by I[saac]. Chera & Sons in 1985.

Description

The A.I. Namm & Son Department Store building at 450-458 Fulton Street (aka 1-7 Hoyt Street) has a horizontal tripartite division consisting of a two-story base (now altered); a midsection with a transitional third story with individual windows, surmounted by four stories with continuous vertical window and bronze spandrel panel bays flanked by piers; and a setback terminating eighth story. The structure is arranged vertically with monumental sculptural piers that rise above the terminating parapet every third bay on the Fulton Street facade and on the rounded corner, and every two bays on Hoyt Street, as well as by the intermediate piers of the midsection. The building is clad in Indiana limestone on the two main street facades. Original window frames are bronze.

Base *The two-story base originally consisted of the main entrance on Fulton Street (with Corinthian columns flanking a monumental arch leading to an inset exterior vestibule with glass doors and fanlights) flanked by large show windows, surmounted by long bronze spandrel panels having an abstracted baluster design above a decorative band, and second-story multi-pane metal windows with transoms and grilles; a three-sided bay on the corner with large show windows, surmounted by second-story multi-pane metal windows with transoms; and a secondary entrance on Hoyt Street, with two show window bays similar to those on Fulton Street. There were originally decorative sconces on each pier and widely-projecting rounded canopy covers, suspended by cables, over the storefronts.* The base is terminated by a molded limestone bandcourse. On the Fulton Street facade is a panel, above where the main entrance was originally, that held the letters “A.I. NAMM & SON;” the “ghosts” of the letters are still visible. At the eastern end of the Fulton Street facade is a visible section of original second-story metal windows with transoms, and at the southern end of the Hoyt Street facade is a visible portion of an original second-story metal window with an end pilaster.

The rest of the base has been completely altered: **Fulton Street** (from east to west): a door with a rolldown gate and parged transom; a storefront with glass doors, transom, and show windows, and a large parged sign band with letters, flanked by piers covered with a polished granite veneer; and a storefront with a glass door, transom, and show windows at the eastern end, piers covered with ceramic tiles, large rolldown gates, and a large parged sign band that extends beyond the facade’s rounded corner. **Hoyt Street:** This is a continuation of the corner storefront on Fulton Street, with piers covered with ceramic tiles, large rolldown gates, and a large parged sign band. At the south end is a door and a metal strip with a louver.

Midsection On the third-story Fulton Street facade are: a pedimented window decorated by a cartouche and surmounted by a flagpole, above the where the main entrance was originally, and three modillioned balconies with decorative metal railings. The original metal windows are casements with transoms at the third story, and multi-pane double-hung sash above (three vertical panes over three vertical panes on the 1924-25 section, and four vertical panes over four vertical panes on the 1928-29 section). Seventh-story windows are segmentally arched. The bronze spandrel panels have an abstracted baluster design above a decorative band. Metal chases for electrical wires have been installed at the eastern end of the building and at the eastern and southern sides of the building’s rounded corner.

Upper Section (8th Story) The tops of the intermediate piers of the midsection are linked by decorative metal balcony railings. The rectangular windows have keystones and multi-pane (three vertical panes over three vertical panes) metal double-hung sash. The tops of the building’s major piers and the rooftop parapet crenellations are linked by metal pipe railings, above a molded stone cornice. Atop the two major piers that originally flanked the main entrance are bronze finials/flagpole holders set on bases, above bronze panels with the letter “N” (for Namm) flanked by torches. There is a brick rooftop bulkhead structure on the Hoyt Street end of the building.

East Facade The eastern end pier of the Fulton Street facade has a limestone return on the east facade. The rest of the visible portion of the facade is clad in tan brick and pierced by windows. A water tower is visible on the roof.

NOTES

1. *New York City Directories* (1876-85); Kings County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; NYC, Dept. of Buildings; A.I. Namm, advertisement, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle (BDE)*, Mar. 29, 1885, 3, Mar. 20, 1887, 12, May 15, 1887, 5, and Mar. 22, 1891, 11; "Brooklyn," *New York Times (NYT)*, Jan. 27, 1888, 3; "A.I. Namm Burned Out," *NYT*, Dec. 8, 1890, 8; "Took Only Bags of Silver," *NYT*, Dec. 25, 1895, 8; "Mrs. A.I. Namm's \$5,000 Loss," *NYT*, Aug. 28, 1909, 16; "A.I. Namm," *BDE*, Sept. 25, 1909; "Brooklyn Theater Sold," *NYT*, July 27, 1919, 22; A.I. Namm obit., *NYT*, Oct. 27, 1920, 11; "Namm Will Aids Charity," *NYT*, Dec. 6, 1921, 19; "Major B.H. Namm Marries Miss Wolf," *NYT*, May 16, 1922, 15; "A.I. Namm's Estate Valued at \$269,695," *NYT*, Jan. 19, 1923, 17; "Helping the Work of the Salesman," *NYT*, Apr. 29, 1923, E10; B.H. Namm obit., *NYT*, Aug. 6, 1969, 39.
2. *BDE*, Sept. 25, 1909.
3. Now Brooklyn Borough Hall (1845-48, Gamaliel King), 209 Joralemon Street, it is a designated New York City Landmark.
4. Mar. 29, 1885.
5. Jan. 27, 1888.
6. Dec. 8, 1890.
7. *BDE*, Mar. 22, 1891.
8. A.I. Namm & Son, *In Memoriam: Adolph I. Namm, June 12, 1856 – October 26, 1920* (N.Y.: 1920), 1.
9. "Namm Loeser's to Close Store....," *NYT*, Feb. 13, 1957.
10. Previously located on this block were the Grand Opera House building on Elm Place; Elm Place Congregational Church; Zip's Casino; Samson's Athletic Club; Oakley's Livery Stable; and Huyler and Liggett stores.
11. Sept. 25, 1909.
12. Surviving from this era are the First Free Congregational Church (1846-47), 311 Bridge Street, and the 182-188 Duffield Street Houses (c. 1835-47), all designated New York City Landmarks.
13. The Offerman Building is a designated New York City Landmark. Gage & Tollner relocated to and altered a c. 1875 structure; it is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark. Dime Savings Bank is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.
14. Federal Writers' Project, *New York City Guide* (N.Y.: Octagon Bks., 1939), 448.
15. Kings County; NYC, Dept. of Buildings (Alts. 2683-1924 and 20695-1928); "New Brooklyn Department Store to Be Built by A.I. Namm & Son," *NYT*, Jan. 13, 1924, RE2; "New A.I. Namm Building Architectural Beauty," *The Chat*, Jan. 19, 1924, 14; "New Department Store," *NYT*, Oct. 19, 1924, RE2; "Brooklyn Plot Sale," *NYT*, Feb. 1, 1925, RE2; "Controllers Visit Namm's," *NYT*, Feb. 3, 1925, 20; "New Namm Store Opened," *NYT*, Feb. 5, 1925,

- 5; "A.I. Namm & Sons Sell," *NYT*, Feb. 18, 1925, 32; "Namm Reports Increase," *NYT*, Apr. 8, 1925, 27; "A.I. Namm & Son Reports," *NYT*, Mar. 26, 1927, 28; "Namm's to Build Annex," *NYT*, June 19, 1928, 48; "New Wing for Namm Department Store," *NYT*, Jan. 27, 1929, RE12; "A.I. Namm & Son," *NYT*, Apr. 7, 1929, N16; "Brooklyn Provides More Office Space" and "Many Large Buildings Changing Fulton St.," *NYT*, Apr. 7, 1929, RE1 and RE2; "Brooklyn Store Expands," *NYT*, Apr. 28, 1929, 182; "Finishing Namm's Building," *NYT*, Oct. 27, 1929, W18.
16. "Namm & Son Offer \$3,500,000 Bonds," *NYT*, June 21, 1923, 26.
17. Jan. 13, 1924.
18. *NYT*, Oct. 19, 1924.
19. *NYT*, Apr. 8, 1925, and Mar. 26, 1927.
20. *NYT*, Apr. 7, 1929, RE1.
21. "How Property Values are Growing in Brooklyn," *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide (RERBG)*, Sept. 7, 1929, 7-8.
22. Dennis S. Francis, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1840-1900* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1979); James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1989); Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and John Massengale, *New York 1900* (N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1983); Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930* (N.Y.: Rizzoli, 1987); Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1960* (N.Y.: Monacelli Pr., 1995); Kohn obit., *NYT*, June 17, 1953, 83; "Robert David Kohn," *Who Was Who in America 3* (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1967), 487, and *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography 46* (N.Y.: 1967), 201-202; LPC, *New York Society for Ethical Culture Designation Report* (LP-0831) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1974) and Architects files; [Spero Building] "Development of the Loft Building," *RERBG*, Apr. 4, 1908, 594; "The Store Building for the Lindner Company," *The Western Architect* (Apr. 1919), 34; Mary-Peale Schofield, *Landmark Architecture of Cleveland* (Pittsburgh: One Park Assocs., Inc., 1976), 110, 115; Clay Herrick, Jr., *Cleveland Landmarks* (Cleveland: Landmarks Publ. Co., 1986), 140-141; [99-103 East 19th Street], *American Architect* (May 1921); [Macy's], *NYT*, Feb. 9, 1922, 11, July 1, 1923, RE2, Sept. 5, 1929, 58, and Sept. 28, 1930, 16; [Macy's warehouse], *NYT*, July 20, 1922, 33; [18-22 East 48th Street], *NYT*, Nov. 13, 1927, RE1, and Mar. 6, 1928, 47; [444 Madison Ave.], *NYT*, Apr. 8, 1930, 57; "R.D. Kohn Receives Architects' Medal," *NYT*, Mar. 3, 1934, 11; Butler obit., *Architectural Record* (July 1953), 292; "Charles Butler," *Who's Who in New York* (1952), 163; Pamela Scott, "A List of American Architectural Competitors," www.sah.org website; [Mt. Sinai Hospital], *NYT*, Jan. 16, 1922, E19, Mar. 13, 1927, RE2, and May 22, 1930, 15; [Dorothy Gray Bdg.], *NYT*, Mar. 3, 1928, 32, and Nov. 4, 1928, 196, and *RERBG*, Mar. 2, 1929, 8; Stein obit., *NYT*, Feb. 8, 1975; "Temple Emanu-El Designs Approved," *NYT*, Mar. 27, 1927, E1; [Fieldston School], *NYT*, Oct. 16, 1927, 18, and Nov. 25, 1928, X16.
23. The River Mansion and 322 West 106th Street house are located within the Riverside Drive-West 105th Street Historic District; the latter house is located within the Upper East Side Historic District.
24. The school is located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District.
25. The Seaman Bros. building is located within the Greenwich Village Historic District. The Evening Post and Ethical Culture buildings are designated New York City Landmarks; the latter is also located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District. The Spero Building is located within the Ladies' Mile Historic District.
26. Kohn's later commissions included a 22-story office building at 18-22 East 48th Street (1927-28, with Lafayette A. Goldstone and Louis E. Jallade); a 30-story office building for the Vanderbilt estate at 501-505 Madison Avenue (1929-30, with Frank E. Vitolo); a 43-story office building at 444 Madison Avenue (1930-31, with Frank E. Vitolo and John J. Knight); and Macy's Department Store (1947, with John J. Knight and Richard C. Belcher), 89-22 165th Street, Jamaica, Queens.

27. This building was a predecessor to the later Dept. of the Interior Building.
28. This building, now apartments, is located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District.
29. The synagogue is located within the Upper East Side Historic District.
30. LPC, *Starrett-Lehigh Building Designation Report* (LP-1295)(N.Y.: City of New York, 1986), prepared by Jay Shockley; Sarah B. Landau and Carl W. Condit, *Rise of the New York Skyscraper 1865-1913* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1996).
31. The St. Regis Hotel, Steinway Hall, and Municipal, Equitable, and Paramount Buildings are designated New York City Landmarks. The Woolworth Building is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.
32. A.I. Namm & Son, drawings in *NYT*, Jan. 13, 1924, and Jan. 27, 1929, and photographs in *NYT*, Feb. 13, 1957, Brooklyn Collection of the Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Historical Society, New York Public Library, and NYC Dept. of Taxes (c. 1939).
33. *NYT*, Oct. 19, 1924.
34. Deborah F. Pokinski, *The Development of the American Modern Style* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Pr., 1984), 51.
35. Both buildings are designated New York City Landmarks; Barclay-Vesey is also an Interior Landmark.
36. Pokinski, 51.
37. *The Western Architect*, 34.
38. "Praises Architect for Americanism," *NYT*, Apr. 27, 1929, 6.
39. "Sees Improvement in Building Design," *NYT*, Jan. 10, 1932, RE3.
40. Kings County; Frederick Loeser obit., *NYT*, Aug. 1, 1911, 9; A.I. Namm & Son, photographs of Morris Lapidus interiors (1947), Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division; "Namm Acquires Loeser's Name..." *NYT*, Mar. 7, 1952, 31; "Namm's Buys Store in Woodmere, L.I.," *NYT*, Nov. 11, 1952, 38; "Namm Loeser's Opens New Branch at Bay Shore," *NYT*, Oct. 31, 1956, 68; "Namm Loeser's to Close Store..." *NYT*, Feb. 13, 1957; "Closing of Namm Saddens Borough," *NYT*, Feb. 14, 1957, 37; "Namm's Draws a Crowd at Last..." *NYT*, Feb. 19, 1957, 43; "Namm's Rebuked by Stockholders," *NYT*, Feb. 27, 1957, 48; "Namm's Liquidation Sale Ending Today," *NYT*, Mar. 2, 1957, 30; "Abraham Straus Buys Namm's Old Property," *NYT*, July 19, 1957, 22; "Namm-Loeser's Studies Offers," *NYT*, Sept. 12, 1957, 44; "Detroit Store Chain and Namm's Agree on Merger Terms," *NYT*, Dec. 12, 1957, 45; "600-Car Garage Slated by A&S," *NYT*, July 25, 1958, 8.
41. The Loeser store building was acquired in April 1952 by Mays Department Stores. "Mays Stores Buys the Loeser Block," *NYT*, Apr. 11, 1952, 36.
42. *NYT*, Feb. 27, 1957.
43. "Old Stores Die, If They Stay Old," *NYT*, Feb. 17, 1957, F1.
44. *NYT*, July 19, 1957.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the A.I. Namm & Son Department Store has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the A.I. Namm & Son Department Store building at 450-458 Fulton Street is the sole surviving portion of the important enterprise that once covered nearly one entire block, and that, despite the alteration of its base, remains a significant architectural and commercial feature of downtown Brooklyn; that Adolph I. Namm, a Polish immigrant who transferred his Manhattan upholstery and embroidery trimmings business to Brooklyn in 1885, opened a new store in 1891 at No. 452 on the stretch of upper Fulton Street that was becoming Brooklyn's commercial nucleus, expanding into a highly successful department store that made him quite wealthy; that Benjamin Harrison Namm, his son, succeeded in running the firm, which became A.I. Namm & Son, and that by the 1920s Namm's was one of the largest such American stores, in competition in Brooklyn with Abraham & Straus; that this structure, Namm's last architectural phase, was built in 1924-25 and 1928-29 to the design of architects Robert D. Kohn and Charles Butler, and consists of a structural steel frame with reinforced concrete floors, clad in Indiana limestone with bronze trim in a highly sophisticated, elegant modern design with a rounded corner that contrasts monumental sculptural masonry piers, vertical window bays, and decorative bronze spandrel panels; that the design was undoubtedly by Kohn, one of the few American architects who had produced aesthetically noteworthy and interesting work (c. 1905-15) influenced by the Vienna Secession, and who explored a different modern aesthetic in the 1920s, a period when American architects were searching for modern architectural forms through various avenues; and that this Fulton Street property continued as a department store (later Namm-Loeser's) until 1957, when it was purchased by the parent firm of Abraham & Straus and adapted for offices and stores.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the A.I. Namm & Son Department Store, 450-458 Fulton Street (aka 1-7 Hoyt Street), Brooklyn, and designates Brooklyn Tax Map Block 157, Lot 9, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair; Pablo Vengoechea, Vice Chair
Stephen Byrns, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Thomas Pike, Jan Pokorny, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners



A. I. Namm & Son Department Store, 450-458 Fulton Street, Brooklyn
Photo: Carl Forster



A.I. Namm & Son Department Store, historic photo (n.d.)
By permission of the Brooklyn Public Library—Brooklyn Collection



A. I. Namm & Son Department Store, mid-section detail
Photo: Carl Forster



A. I. Namm & Son Department Store, 450-458 Fulton Street, Brooklyn
Photo: Carl Forster



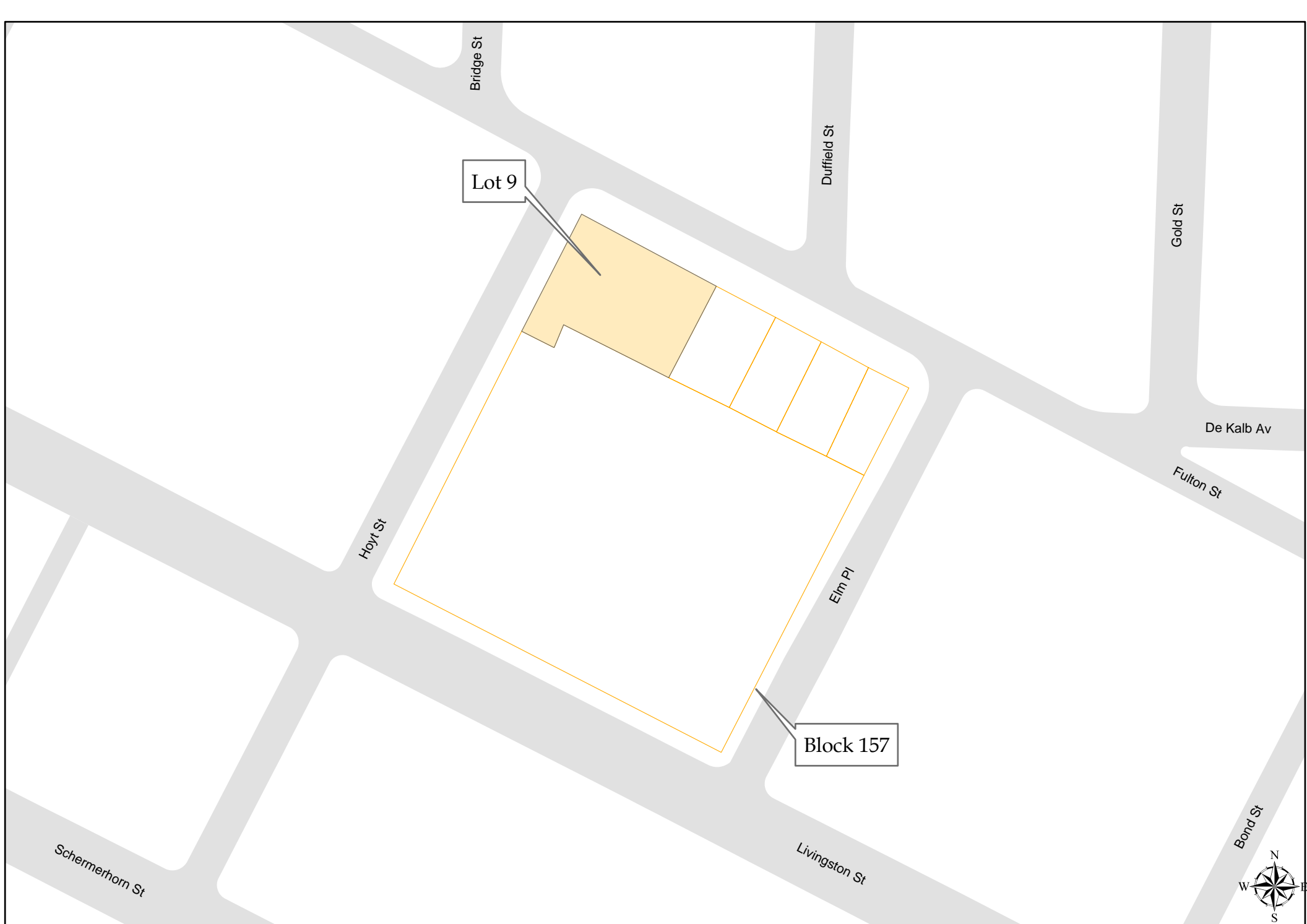
A. I. Namm & Son Department Store, 450-458 Fulton Street, Brooklyn
Photo: Carl Forster



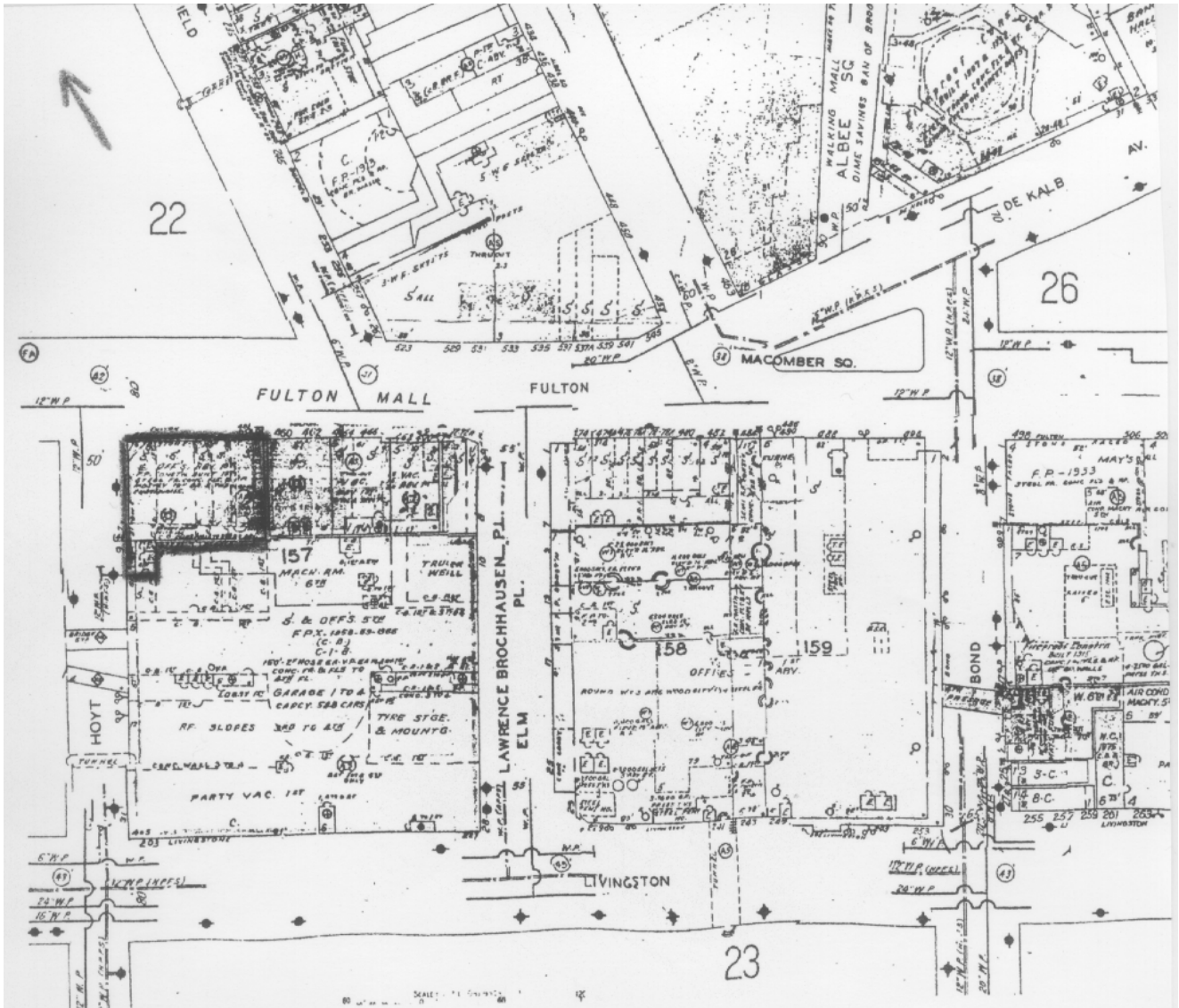
A. I. Namm & Son Department Store, 450-458 Fulton Street
Photo: Carl Forster



A. I. Namm & Son Department Store, bronze finial/flagpole holder
Photo: Carl Forster



A. I. Namm & Son Department Store, 450-458 Fulton Street, Brooklyn
Landmark Site: Brooklyn Tax Map Block 157, Lot 9
Source: Dept. of City Planning MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003



A. I. Namm & Son Department Store, 450-458 Fulton Street, Brooklyn
Source: Sanborn, *Building and Property Atlas of Brooklyn* (2003), vol. 2, pl. 24