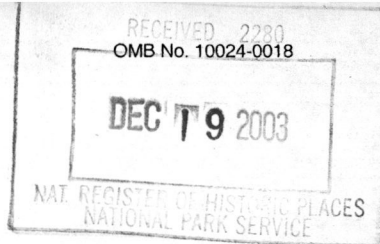


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



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

1. Name of Property

historic name Fred F. French Building

other names/site number French Building

2. Location

street & number 551 Fifth Avenue [] not for publication

city or town New York [] vicinity

state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10176-0001

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Mike Carter, SAPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

12/03/03
Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
[] see continuation sheet
[] determined eligible for the National Register
[] see continuation sheet
[] determined not eligible for the National Register

[] removed from the National Register

[] other (explain) _____

Edson R. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

1/28/04
Date of action

Fred F. French Building

New York County, New York

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	TOTAL

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

OTHER/Exotic Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete; granite

walls brick; limestone

roof asphalt with aluminum paint finish

other bronze; limestone; terracotta

Narrative Description

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

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7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION¹

SITE

The Fred F. French Building (French Building) is a commercial high-rise tower located on an irregular site on the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and 45th Street, a busy commercial corner in midtown Manhattan. The lot is rectangular with a twenty-foot projection on the north. To the north of the French Building is a 20-story commercial building that wraps around the French Building with an L-shaped plan and to the east is a 9-story commercial building.

Although Fifth Avenue is a more prestigious address, the French building's major entrance is on 45th Street.² The site's great length along East 45th Street permitted a grand entrance through a wide, bronze arched portal and marble vestibule into the lobby. By contrast, prime Fifth Avenue frontage was reserved for high-income rental space. The Fred F. French Building is located within close proximity to Grand Central Terminal and when it was built in 1927 it was in an excellent location for the rapidly developing business district at midtown Fifth Avenue.

EXTERIOR

General

The Fred F. French Building is a 38-story commercial office tower with complicated setbacks and rich Mesopotamian and Egyptian ornamental details. A skeletal steel structure, it is sheathed in russet-colored brick with limestone trim and polychromatic terracotta ornament, and is relieved on the ground floor by bronze-framed bays and ornamental fascia. The building has a tripartite configuration: 1) a three-story limestone base with fifteen commercial bays and an elaborate arched entrance on both Fifth Avenue and 45th Street; 2) a pyramidal midsection which rises sheer to the eleventh floor before receding in a series of setbacks; and 3) a rectangular tower which rises sheer to the 35th floor before setting back with a triplex penthouse. The tower terminates with a water tower, elaborately masked by large faience bas-reliefs and crowned by a utilitarian flat roof.

Each of the building's four elevations has its own distinct massing. The west facade on Fifth Avenue and south facade on 45th Street are completely exposed. The north and east elevations, by contrast, are abutted by later construction and therefore only partially visible from the street. They are, however, clearly visible from tall buildings in the area.

Bronze Frieze

On the ground floor a segmented bronze frieze crowns the building's two entrances and fifteen commercial bays. The metopes are inhabited by winged Assyrian beasts each separated by stylized penta-

¹ Many portions of this section are taken directly, or in edited form, from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission's *Fred F. French Designation Report* (LP-1415), prepared by Amy Galanos, March 1986.

² A photograph of the 45th Street vestibule was identified as the "Main Entrance" in "Entering the Fred F. French Building," *The Voice*, 3 (August 1928), p. 3.

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or tetraglyphs (vestiges of classical Greek triglyphs, here elaborated and Egyptianized with lotus and papyrus stalks).

Entrance Arches

The elaborate bronze entrance arches are framed by a Greco-Egyptian molding of lotus and papyrus, and rest atop coffered Renaissance piers. Two figures are compressed in the arches' spandrels. The male figure on the left holds a column in his right hand and in his left, a compass and two T-squares (symbols of architecture and building). In the right spandrel a female companion holds a beehive. A common symbol for industry (and one especially appropriate for Fred French), the motif is repeated at the top of the building's tower in two giant faience panels on the east and west elevations. The lavish embellishments of the entrances are continued in the outer vestibule on Fifth Avenue, the vault of which is inhabited by a polychromatic menagerie of winged Mesopotamian beasts. Similarly treated is the enclosed vestibule on 45th Street.

Setbacks

Like many Art Deco skyscrapers, the Fred French Building followed Assyrian ziggurats in its hierarchic coloration. The building's lower setbacks are emphasized by limestone-trimmed friezes of black ornament on a terra cotta ground, recalling ancient Greek pottery in both their pigment geometric patterns.

Tower Bas-Reliefs

The building's tower, by contrast, is relieved by the lighter and brighter culmination of the entire decorative program. Especially notable is a frieze of orange and green serpents interlaced with an almost Art Nouveau fluidity. Above, on the broad north and south elevations, are identical rectangular panels of brilliant orange, green, red and gold faience. In the center of each bas-relief is a rising sun, a common motif in architectural decoration of the late 1920s. Symbolizing Progress, it is flanked on either side by a winged griffon (Integrity and Watchfulness). The motif is framed on the right and left, by a beehive encircled with golden bees, symbols of Industry and Thrift. The narrow north and south elevations of the rectangular tower are emblazoned with the framed head of Mercury, god of commerce and divine messenger. Unlike other skyscrapers in New York which depended primarily on silhouette for skyline impact, the Fred French Building was unique in its roof line iconographic program. Centrally located in low-rise, but rapidly developing midtown, it was a conspicuous advertisement for The French Plan, the numerous French companies, and the man who masterminded them all.

FIFTH AVENUE FAÇADE

The Base

Six double-story limestone piers divide the Fifth Avenue facade into an entrance and four commercial bays. A historical view of the northernmost bay on Fifth Avenue depicts an original glass shop front with granite water table and recessed central entrance, that leads to an outer vestibule, crowned by a bronze lower signage fascia (concealing a retractable awning) above which was a ribbon of five multipane windows, and a decorative bronze frieze.

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2nd Bay Entrance

The bronze entrance, found in the second bay from the east, consists of an elaborate arch, the front and back faces of which are embossed with a lotus and papyrus molding. The arch rests atop grooved capitals and piers with octagonal coffers and rosette inserts on a floral ground. The same coffers appear on the arch intrados, interrupted only by two small recessed down lights. The piers are supported on polished granite bases (connected by a matching granite pavement slab). The arch spandrels are occupied by symbolic bronze figures. Surmounting the arch is a black metal fascia where the building is identified with applied bronze letters ("THE FRENCH BUILDING"). Above the fascia is a decorative bronze frieze, differing from the others only in its tetraglyphs. The second story windows have transoms.

Outer Vestibule

The outer vestibule is crowned by a depressed barrel vault and flanked on either side by a bronze-framed display window that on the south has a single bronze muntin. The vault is relieved by painted stepped corners and paired winged beasts in polychromatic bas-relief. From the geometric pattern at the center of the vault hangs a crystal and bronze chandelier, specially designed by the architects to be non-shadow producing. The vault is connected to the display windows by a bronze cornice which repeats at larger scale the lotus-anthemion molding of the facade's bronze frieze. The vestibule's Italian travertine floor is inlaid with beige Kato stone diamonds and border and a narrower border of black Belgian and white Dover marble triangles between brass strips. The side walls of the vestibule terminate at each end with golden veined St. Genevieve marble pilasters, each ornamented with applied bronze spears and crowned by a beveled capital with a gilded diaper-patterned surface.

At the far end of the vestibule is an elaborate bronze entrance with two revolving doors, the glass lights of which are surrounded by embossed rosettes. Projecting from the jambs are bundled shaft half-columns on faceted bases. Decoratively bound by rope collars, these Near Eastern-inspired supports are crowned by protome capitals of cast bronze ox heads. A pair of these columns frames the central jamb, the paneled ground of which bears Fred French's monogram ("FFF" in script). The columns support a bronze frieze with floral-topped pentaglyphs and two dark brown inscription panels: "THE FRENCH BUILDING" above the left door, "551 FIFTH AVENUE" above the right. The frieze is topped by a row of dentils and a parapet of stepped castellations, each studded with a rosette. Set back, and rising above the parapet is a transparent glass screen with decorative bronze muntins and colonnette mullions. The seven lower lights of the screen are arranged in a tall arcade (with a single prominent muntin). This is topped by a bronze-framed lunette of small multi-pane windows which extends to the underside of the vault.

Bronze Frieze

Bordered by a lower geometric molding and separated by pentaglyphs (or in some cases, tetraglyphs) of lotus and papyrus stalks, the frieze's five metopes are inhabited by winged Assyrian beasts each resting on a beveled ground and crowned by an abstracted forest pattern. A continuous row of round-headed studs lies along the upper edge of the frieze, followed by a rosette molding and another of anthemion and lotus.

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Shop Fronts

Bronze shop fronts, designed to replicate the original Fred F. French shop fronts were installed at both the 45th Street facade and the Fifth Avenue facade during a restoration of the building in the 1990's.

2nd STORY

Above the latter molding lie the second-story steel framed tri-partite windows; a large stationary pane flanked on either side by a pair of narrow lights, some divided by full or partial transom bars. The mullions between the central and sidelights are fluted and crowned by small Ionic capitals. A ribbed bronze molding runs from the granite water table and frames the entire two-story bay.

Above the 2nd story windows is a limestone frieze in the center of which applied bronze letters identify the building as: "THE FRED F. FRENCH BUILDING." Two angled wooden flagpoles with bronze anchors project above the second and fifth piers.

3rd STORY

Introduced on the third floor is the standard window type used throughout the building's mid-section and tower (excepting the uppermost penthouse story): one-over-one double hung steel sash, recessed slightly from the plane of the facade. The third story is crowned by a limestone cornice, studded with rosettes and bordered by an upper chevron molding.

45th STREET FACADE

Thirteen limestone piers divide the 45th Street facade into an arched entrance and eleven commercial bays. The basic configuration follows that outlined for Fifth Avenue. The 45th Street entrance, located in the eighth bay from the north, is exactly the same as that on Fifth Avenue except for the insertion of four modern glass doors and a bronze-framed transom behind the arch.

MID-SECTION: 4th - 19th STORIES

The russet-brick walls rise flush on all four sides up to the 11th floor after which the building sets back in various configurations according to the zoning ordinance (see photographs). The setbacks (together with significant building lines) are emphasized by limestone-trimmed fascias of red and black faience in geometric patterns, some with gold rosettes. Pier capitals are rendered in light green faience and ornamented with a small rosette. The windows uniformly follow the type described above in "Fifth Avenue Facade; 3rd story." Above most windows are metal spandrels with a decorative checkerboard relief.

THE TOWER: 20th - 38th STORIES

Girdled by a green and orange faience belt course on the 31st floor, the rectangular tower rises sheer to the 34th story on its narrow east elevation and to several floors higher on the west. The tower's broader north and south sides have gentle recesses. The limestone-trimmed 34th floor has faience spandrels above which is an orange and green frieze of interlaced serpents. The water tower above the 38th floor is masked by symbolic bas-reliefs, brightly colored on a light green ground and encircled by a rosette-studded red

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faience frame. On the rear (east) elevation of the tower is an exposed metal fire escape. Penthouse windows deviate from the one-over-one double hung steel sash elsewhere in the building. Various configurations exist, most frequently a single pane with divided transom above.

INTERIOR

The public area of the first floor interior is configured like an irregular L: a long corridor leading east from Fifth Avenue into the elevator lobby from which projects an enclosed vestibule south to 45th Street. The walls are faced in gray golden-veined St. Genevieve marble. They are lined by a plaster frieze (lotus and anthemion between an upper and lower rosette course) and a narrow lotus cornice. The frieze and cornice are gilded to match the lobby's numerous gilt-bronze fixtures, and are continuous in all public areas of the first floor interior. The only exception occurs in the fourth and fifth bays of the Fifth Avenue corridor which are covered by a low, flat ceiling (stenciled with geometric patterns). A depressed banded barrel vault covers the rest of the interior. Paired ribs protrude from the vault in the first three bays off Fifth Avenue, but are otherwise painted on the vault surface. A groin vault covers the intersection of the interior's north-south and east-west axes. The polychromed vault surfaces are ornamented and partially gilded with stenciled geometric patterns and various Mesopotamian beasts in low relief. The floor is Italian travertine, inset with beige Kato stone diamonds and border, and a narrower border of Belgian black and white Dover marble triangles set between brass strips.

45th Street Entrance

Although the French Building is situated on Fifth Avenue (from which it takes its primary address), the major building entrance is actually located on 45th Street where the site's great length permitted a short, but wide, marble vestibule.³ Enclosed by a modern transparent glass screen (installed behind the building's outer entrance arch), the vestibule leads directly into the lobby through the single leaf-door and two revolving doors of an elaborate gilt-bronze frontal. Its jambs and lintels are relieved by a wealth of Near Eastern motifs ranging from ox head profane capitals atop bundled shafts to winged horses and lush Mesopotamian flora. Above the castellated door housing, and connecting it to the vestibule's polychrome vault, is a multi-pane gilt bronze transom.

Fifth Avenue Entrance and Corridor

A similar, although abbreviated, frontal and transom appear in the recessed entrance on Fifth Avenue. But here the central, single-leaf door was omitted, and the two revolving doors were flanked by glazed shop windows (in lieu of marble walls): prime Fifth Avenue frontage was reserved for high-income rental space. As a result, entry from this facade requires passage down a corridor which is slightly narrower, but considerably longer, than that on 45th Street. The corridor is segmented into bays by pilasters with bronze spear inserts and crowned, above a gilded plaster frieze, by a polychromed vault with animated mythological beasts and stenciled geometric patterns. The corridor's pronounced rake was an expedient

³ E.A. Park, *New Backgrounds for a New Age* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1927), p. 148.

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solution to the different grade levels of higher Fifth Avenue and gently sloped 45th Street, but it also served to draw businessmen and other visitors more quickly, almost irresistibly into the elevator hall.

Elevator Lobby

The lobby glistens in a dazzling concentration of bronze ornament. Nothing, it seems, escaped an exotic flourish. All three of the building's directory boards were framed by bronze pilasters and crowned by a floral and castellated frieze. A pair of bronze doors at the eastern end of the lobby was surrounded by embossed rosettes and even the double-chute mailbox received the greatest artistic attention. Framed and castellated like the building's entrances and directories, this pendant wall fixture dramatizes the Post Office insignia atop a pair of dorsal winged griffons. Each suspends from its beak an embossed medallion: that on the left cleverly incorporates the mailbox lock; that on the right, the pervasive monogram of Fred F. French. By positioning the mailbox between two elevator banks on the wall opposite the 45th Street vestibule, this utilitarian feature was made a central attraction in the well-traveled lobby.

Gilt-bronze Doors

Vying for attention, and more powerful by sheer number, are the closely situated gilt-bronze doors which enclose each of the lobby's ten elevators as well as five additional entrances to an office and stairwells. The elevator doors are standard double leaf; the other doors duplicate their configuration but are actually side-hinged single leaves. In each case, the paired door panels have eight deep reveals in which variously posed figures (partially draped women and bearded Assyrian genii) symbolize Industry, Commerce, Finance and Building, i.e. the sundry business concerns of Fred F. French. There are also three more simple gilt-bronze doors in the lobby, their central glazing surrounded by rosettes.

Chandeliers

The impact of so much gilt-bronze against lustrous, gray and honey-colored marble walls is both resplendent and alluring, all threat of meretriciousness having been diffused by the soft illumination of the lobby's eight chandeliers. Each fixture consists of a bronze foliate shell from which a dozen etched-crystal fins project. Specially designed by the architects to be shadow less, they cast a dreamy halo of faceted light on the polychromed vaults above. In addition to their primary role of illumination, these splendid fixtures also serve as elevator directories: inscriptions "FLOORS//1 TO 16" and "FLOORS//17 TO 38" were cleverly incised (twice) into the lower rims of the appropriate chandeliers.

Upper Floors

The shape and size of the floor plates for the upper stories varies by floor, shrinking in size as the tower sets back in multiple directions from the street wall. At the base of the building, floors 2 through 11 have approximately 16,000 square feet each, while the top of the tower, floors 29 through 35 have only 4,000 square feet and the penthouse floors only 2,400 square feet. At the base, the floor plan is a short, shallow L-shape with a twenty-foot extension to the north projecting from the primary east-west rectangle of the floor plate. Above the base, floor plans reflect the balconies and roofs created by the complicated setbacks at the south and west facades.

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Eleven passenger elevators in the center of the building (towards the north end) and two stair towers provide vertical circulation for the building. Five elevators service the low-rise portions of the building (lobby through 18) and five elevators service the high-rise portions of the tower (above 19). A single elevator provides access to the penthouse (35th floor to 38th floor).

Historically and currently, the upper floors were leased to professional tenants, and over time, the original finishes at almost all floors were removed or concealed by modern finishes. At an unknown time, the auditorium, mentioned in several articles in *The Voice*, was removed and reconfigured for new uses. The French Company offices, finished in a Tudor revival style, were located on the 12th and 13th floors and they retained this office space until the 1980's when it ceased operation and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company purchased the building. The 12th floor retains many of its historic finishes and will be described in greater detail below. The 13th floor was completely remodeled with modern finishes.

The layout and finishes of the upper floors vary widely. Single tenant floors tend to have a more open configuration than multiple tenant floors. Generally, the elevator lobbies are centrally located and lead to office spaces in four directions.

The second floor elevator lobby retains some original finishes mixed with modern finishes. The historic finishes include a marble base molding, wood door surrounds and sidelights, wood paneled doors, hardware, bronze elevator indicators, and room number plates. Modern finishes include carpeting, sheet rock walls covered with wallpaper, modern doors and metal door surrounds, a suspended ceiling, and modern light fixtures. Many floors retain their historic polished bronze and glass mail chutes, elevator indicators, and room number plates.

The finishes at the other floors vary widely according to the current tenant's taste and budget. Floor finishes include modern carpet, stone tile, wood flooring, and plastic tile. Wall finishes include modern plastic, wood, or stone base moldings, painted or papered sheet rock or plaster walls, and throughout the building (with only minor exceptions), suspended tile ceilings. Historic finishes may remain behind modern finishes.

12th Floor – Former Fred F. French Company Office

Unlike the proto-Art Deco and exotic revival style of the exterior and the lobby spaces, the offices of the Fred F. French Company were finished in a Tudor revival style. Although heavily altered in the 1980's when the French Company sold and vacated the building, much of the original finishes remain at the 12th floor.

The elevator lobby at the 12th floor has modern carpet, a green marble base molding, Kato stone wall cladding, arches, and capitals, a plaster cornice, a coffered plaster ceiling that is painted and stenciled with a floral design, green marble door and elevator surrounds, bronze elevator indicators, and two glass and bronze mail chutes. A circular stair leading to the 13th floor, located to the west of the elevator bank in the

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elevator lobby has black stone treads, green marble risers, a polished bronze balustrade ornamented, and a polished bronze handrail.

Modern doors lead from the elevator lobby to the reception hall (rectangular in plan), which is richly finished with white and green, and black marble tile floors, a black marble base molding, Kato stone wall surfaces, green marble door surrounds, small semi-circular niches (2) with scalloped coved Kato stone ceilings, original light sconces (6), and a plaster coffered ceiling painted and stenciled with a floral pattern.

Spaces with extant historic finishes are found to the east and south of the reception hall. The large space to the west of the reception hall no longer retains its historic finishes.

To the east of the reception hall is the former Fred F. French Company reception area, which is roughly I-shaped in plan with a small niche projecting southward from the center narrow section of the "I." The room retains its historic marble tile floors, black marble base molding (same as found in the reception hall described above), wood paneling with fine molded details, a wood finished semi-circular niche with a scalloped coved wood ceiling, original wall sconces (4), a wood beamed ceiling with flat plaster panels in between beams, and a fireplace with a modern pink marble mantle. All of the wood elements appear to be stained and covered with a clear finish.

To the south of the reception hall is a conference room, rectangular in plan with two arched entryways (one filled in) and two steel double-hung windows (typical for the building). Extant historic finishes include the marble tile floor and base molding described above, wood paneled walls, original radiators and radiator cabinets (wood), original light sconces (4), a wood cornice, and a simple plaster coffered ceiling painted white.

A corridor leading east from the reception hall (south of the former Fred F. French Company reception area) retains its historic wood base molding and wainscot, and a few original wood door surrounds and doors. The walls above the wainscot are either painted plaster or painted sheetrock. There is a suspended panel ceiling.

Due east from the former Fred F. French Company reception area is the former executive secretary's office which is rectangular in plan. Extant historic finishes include an arched plaster entryway, coved painted plaster ceiling with cast ornamental details (including clusters of grapes, grape leaves, flowers, heraldic crests, vines, and rope), plaster soffits at the edges of the coved ceiling, and plaster light medallions (2) on the ceiling. The other finishes are modern.

North of the executive secretary's office is the reputed site of Mr. French's office, which is L-shaped in plan and has seven windows (4 facing north and 3 facing east). This space probably included two more window bays to the west of the current space (now a mechanical room) where a pair of original leaded glass double-hung windows were found. The upper sash of the west window has a painted heraldic crest.

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Extant finishes in the office space are confined to its plaster beamed ceiling with ornamental details that are similar to those found in the secretary's office.

Name of Property

County and State

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

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Community Planning and DevelopmentArchitecture**Period of Significance:**1927-1936**Significant Dates:**19271936**Significant Person:**French, Fred F.**Cultural Affiliation:**N/A**Architect/Builder:**Sloan & RoberstonIves, H. Douglas

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE⁴

SUMMARY

Located in bustling midtown Manhattan, the Fred F. French Building was constructed in 1926-27 as corporate headquarters for the prominent real estate mogul and real estate firm of the same name. The building meets Criterion B in the areas of community planning and development for its association with Fred F. French (b. 1883/d. 1936), considered among the greatest developers in New York for his combination of both real estate and financial prowess. It also meets Criterion C for its architectural merits as a significant example of distinctive corporate imagery dating from the era of New York's greatest building boom. Financed by the first commercial application of Fred French's cooperative investment plan, the building was broadly applauded for its ornament, technological advances and unusually accomplished planning. Upon its completion in 1927, the Fred F. French Building was also renowned as one of the two tallest structures in the vicinity. And while that claim was subsequently relinquished, it remains a strikingly individual monument, conspicuous on its corner site against the backdrop of more conservative, frequently classicizing, limestone masses. The period of significance spans from its initial construction in 1927 up to 1936, the year of French's death.

A proto-Art Deco design, with strong Near Eastern influences, it represents the stylistic compromise between lingering historicism and the modernistic trends that typified the architecture of the late 1920s. The Near Eastern allusion is enhanced by a dramatic series of setbacks. Although mandated by the Building Code of 1916, these wedding cake-like tiers found a romantic corollary in Assyrian ziggurats. The setbacks taper off to a lofty terraced tower which enriches the midtown skyline with iconographic bas-reliefs, Mesopotamian in both their imagery and execution in richly colored terracotta. Together with ornamental friezes and other polychromatic details, the reliefs contrast to splendid effect with the building's limestone trim and russet-colored brick walls. The exotic character of the 38-story structure is especially notable at ground level where two bronze entrances and fifteen commercial bays are embellished with mythological figures and a wealth of Near Eastern flora.

The French Building survives substantially intact as a compelling response to the zoning ordinance and a distinguished example of architectural eclecticism in the late 1920s. In contrast with the sculptural terminations of most contemporaneous tall buildings and especially with the spiky peaks of slightly later skyscrapers, the French Building is set apart by its flat utilitarian roof. Glazed symbolic panels mask its water tower and glisten brilliantly in the sun, making the French Building immediately recognizable among neighboring towers. The panels were a unique contribution to the midtown skyline in 1927, and remain so to this day.

⁴Many portions of this section are taken directly, or in edited form, from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission's *Fred F. French Building Designation Report* (LP-1415), prepared by Amy Galanos, March 1986.

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDTOWN BUSINESS CENTER

The mid- and late 1920's witnessed an unprecedented building boom in midtown Manhattan. Indeed, construction along Fifth Avenue was so active that it was hailed as "the seventh wonder of twentieth-century commerce."⁵ Growing apace were the Grand Central Zone immediately to the east, and the Garment Center on the west, the latter located between 30th and 40th Streets, off Sixth Avenue. Broadway theater construction was simultaneously proceeding at break-neck speed, adding some forty-five playhouses to the area around Times Square in the first two decades of the century alone. By 1930 the total had surpassed eighty. A major thoroughfare through the theater zone is Sixth Avenue, which was forecast, in the late 1920s as Manhattan's new commercial frontier. Expectations for its revival were encouraged by plans for the imminent demolition of the Sixth Avenue El (which, however, did not occur until 1940). Sixth Avenue thus held great interest for New York's major real estate developers, not the least of whom was Fred F. French.

Warren & Wetmore's Grand Central Terminal (NHL 12/8/76), completed in 1913, propelled concurrent building activity in eastern midtown. The focus of east side commuter traffic, it played a pivotal role in the area's development as a financial center, ranking in importance "second only to Wall Street."⁶ The surrounding region was owned by the New York Central Railroad, which improved its properties through a coordinated policy for the erection of tall office buildings and hotels. Removal of the 42nd Street spur of the Third Avenue Railway also encouraged growth, leaving the street ripe for commercial development and reclamation by pedestrians and vehicular traffic.⁷ The area around 42nd Street thus became a busy link between the Grand Central Zone on the east, Times Square and the booming west side.

Perhaps most spectacular was the development of Fifth Avenue, and particularly, its midtown section. On the occasion of the Avenue's centennial in 1924, the Fifth Avenue Association published *Fifth Avenue: Old and New* in which the two preceding years (1922-24) were cited as the peak of building activity.⁸ Subsequent construction, however, proved even greater in scope. The fifteen office buildings constructed in 1925 were "not matched in any year after World War II until 1957. The thirty office buildings constructed in 1926 have not been matched since."⁹ The Fred F. French Building was among that record-breaking thirty.

The proliferation of new buildings was fostered by such civic improvements as street widening and repair (widening operations of Fifth Avenue were first undertaken in 1907, and completed in 1929). Also influential was the strict enforcement of zoning regulations, and other laws affecting realty and business.¹⁰ Statistics indicate that Fifth Avenue frontage represented only 8% (one and a half square miles) of Manhattan's total area, yet in 1926 it comprised 25% of total building investments. Earlier in the century,

⁵ Henry Collins Brown, *Fifth Avenue: Old and New* (New York: Wynkoop, Hallenbeck & Crawford Co., 1924), p. 101.

⁶ "Unique Low Building for Grand Central District," *Real Estate Record and Guide*, October 15, 1927, p. 9.

⁷ "Building Activity on Lexington Avenue," *New York Times*, March 4, 1928, sec. 12, p. 2.

⁸ Brown, p. 101.

⁹ Cervin Robinson and Rosemary Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 12.

¹⁰ "Steady Increase Shown In Real Estate Values," *New York Times*, July 25, 1926, sec. 10, p. 1.

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45th Street was seen as the northernmost boundary for sound building ventures. However, by 1923 quality construction had already appeared on 46th Street, and in the following years, continued its northward progression along both sides of Fifth Avenue.¹¹

One of the independent (non-New York Central Railroad) pioneers in the commercial revitalization of the area was real estate developer Fred F. French. By March of 1925 he had purchased land on the northeast corner of 45th Street and Fifth Avenue. At the time, the properties were occupied by an office building, four dwellings and the Church of the Heavenly Rest, all of which were razed to accommodate the Fred F. French Company's corporate headquarters.¹² The midtown location of the new building was at once boldly calculating and touchingly sentimental: one of the first jobs French had even held was next to this site as a near-destitute timekeeper at the exclusive Home Club (11 East 45th Street). French never forgot his humble beginnings.

Balancing the romantic was Fred French the astute businessman. In 1859, the corner lots on Fifth Avenue and 45th Street had been estimated at \$2.80 per square foot. By the time French bought them some 65 years later their value had centupled. Nonetheless, the \$250-\$285 per square foot price that French paid for the 19,000 square foot site was a bargain when similar choice properties were being sold for \$300 per square foot or more.¹³ French Company stockholders congratulated themselves on "one of the shrewdest real estate purchases on Manhattan Island during the last decade."

FRED F. FRENCH

Fred Fillmore French was born on October 14, 1883 at East 86th Street in Manhattan, but subsequently moved with his family to East 162nd Street in the Bronx. His mother was a college graduate and a niece of United States president Millard Fillmore (in honor of whom Fred French received his middle name). French's father, by contrast, was an impoverished cigar maker. He died when French was a child, leaving the boy (the eldest of four children) to help support his family with a variety of part-time jobs.

Upon completion of elementary school, French won the Pulitzer Scholarship to the Horace Mann High School and then attended Princeton for a year, before heading to Mexico "for a taste of ranching."¹⁴ When French returned to New York in 1905, he became interested in building, and enrolled in an engineering course at Columbia University. He was variously employed as a general utility man, a gang foreman on a

¹¹ Ibid. See also Brown, *Fifth Avenue: Old and New*, p. 103.

¹² Demolition Permit 227-25. See also "The French Companies Buy Big Plot on Fifth Avenue and 45th Street," *New York Times*, March 20, 1925, p. 34.

¹³ The \$250 per square foot price was quoted in "Two Fifth Avenue Corners Compared," *The Voice*, 2 (December, 1927), p. 1. The *New York Times*, however, recorded the higher price of \$285 per square foot ("The French Companies Buy Big Plot," Ibid.). French subsequently confirmed the latter price ("Real Estate Croakers," *The Voice*, 3 (July 1930), 3).

¹⁴ Fred F. French. Obituary. *New York Times*, August 31: 1936, p. 15. For additional information on French see his obituary in the *Real Estate Record and Guide*, September 5, 1936, p. 1 and Robert M. Coates, "Profiles: Realtor [Fred F. French]," *The New Yorker*, June 1, 1929, p. 22-25.; "Romance in the Lives of City Builders," *New York Times*, February 24, 1929, sec. 12, p. 3; Murchison, "Architect Tolerates French and His Building," *The Architect*, 7 (January, 1927), 505, and articles throughout *The Voice*, the official organ of the Fred F. French Company (published 1926-30).

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reservoir project in White Plains, New York, a building superintendent and most memorably, as timekeeper near the site of his future corporate headquarters. By the time French was forty, he had hired his former teacher from Columbia and many of his early employers to work as vice-presidents in his expanding real estate and building empire.

Fred F. French formed his namesake company in 1910 when he was 27. As president, he drew a \$15 weekly salary, with one small boy as his workforce. Beginning as a humble contractor in the basement of his Bronx home, French soon purchased the property (his first acquisition) and proved himself a financial genius. Despite betrayal by his first partner (a former Alaskan missionary) French recovered, and within a decade of his company's founding arranged for a \$250,000 loan. He used the money to construct a 16-story office building on the northwest corner of 41st Street and Madison Avenue, several floors of which French occupied upon its completion in March 1920.¹⁵ Barely five years later, he purchased the 45th Street site for new corporate headquarters. Vastly larger than the previous building, more costly and lavish by far, it amply testified to his meteoric rise. Less than fifteen years after establishing his company, French had become one of the foremost developers in New York. His "one and a half-man business" had swelled into a multi-faceted operation (ultimately with international involvements), which was staffed by hundreds of employees. When the French Building opened in 1927 the total value of the French Company's activities amounted to no less than \$90,000,000.¹⁶

At the core of this stunning success was the "French Plan" which Fred French created in 1921. An innovative form of co-investment by the French Company and its tenants/owners, the Plan was based on "making a small profit on a large business as opposed to large profits on a small business."¹⁷ French explained the concept as follows:

It is our belief that the people whose money helped to make such building enterprises possible should receive in addition to safety, a fair share of the profits earned. Accordingly, it was decided that the entire net profits from the operation of a building should be devoted towards repaying the investors, together with 6% cumulative dividends, before any distribution of such profits could be made to the Fred F. French Companies. Thereafter, by equal division of the common stock, the public receives half the profits in perpetuity.¹⁸

Unlike the more common cooperative investment plans, the French Plan turned over land to its investors at actual cost without padding construction or real estate expenses.

¹⁵ Coates, p. 22.

¹⁶ NB364-19. See also "New Home for the Fred F. French Company," *New York Times*; April 4, 1920, sec. 9, p. 2.

¹⁷ "The French Companies," *New York Times*, November 6, 1927, sec. 12, p. 1.

¹⁸ French. Obituary, [*New York Times*].

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Crucial to the success of the French Plan was the comprehensive organization of French's multiple real estate and building concerns. In the course of time, his various involvements developed into individual companies. Each handled a different aspect of French's enterprises, but was united under one president, head architect, builder, owner, contractor and underwriter. According to The Plan, the Fred F. French Investing Company acquired a site, and the design and program laid out and supervised by the Fred F. French Company, Architects and Builders. The Fred F. French Investing Company underwrote and sold the stock for the new corporation (formed in each case for building ownership). The Investing Company retained 50% of the stock for services in underwriting and promotion. Finally, upon completion of the building by the Fred F. French Construction Company, it was turned over to the Fred F. French Management Company.¹⁹

The Fred F. French Building on Fifth Avenue appears to have been the first commercial application of the French Plan. Prior to 1925-26 The Plan had been restricted to residential properties, including apartment houses at 15, 16, 17 and 55 Park Avenue, 34 East 51st Street, 247 West 75th Street, 22 West 77th and other buildings, including several on Fifth Avenue. Among the latter were apartment houses at numbers 1140 and 1160, and another at 1110 (the penthouse of which French occupied with his family).²⁰ Also financed by the Plan were two vast East Side enterprises — Tudor City (NR-listed 9-11-86) and Knickerbocker Village (in NR-listed Two Bridges Historic District)— and it was there that the financial wizardry of Fred French was best revealed.

His \$100,000,000 Tudor City started with the purchase of a five-acre site on Prospect Hill in December 1925. This seemingly undesirable area was located several blocks east of Grand Central Terminal, and was cluttered with tenements, slaughterhouses and breweries. By 1930, however, French had transformed the site into an eminently successful residential development. The complex was desirable for the consciously domestic quality of its Tudoresque buildings, and highly attractive for its proximity to the midtown business district. Amid dense urban congestion, French had developed a quiet middle-class garden community from which thousands of tenants could walk to work. The achievement was unprecedented.

The success of Tudor City prompted French to grander visions. In 1928 he organized the \$50,000,000 Fred F. French Operators Inc. Straying from his previous policy of purchasing property specifically for building purposes, French determined to "buy and sell real "estate either for quick turn [overs] or to hold for increase in value. The new company," he explained, "being ten times larger than the Fred French Investing Company... could... build ten Tudor Cities!"²¹

French had planned various suburban developments for Westchester and elsewhere in New York, but actually undertook a second large-scale complex in Manhattan. As at Tudor City, which was then (1928)

¹⁹ Ibid. See also "New Ownership Plan for Tenants," *New York Times*, March 15, 1923, p. 2.

²⁰ Coates, p. 22. See also Fred F. French, Obituary, *Real Estate Record and Guide*. See also Fred F. French, "The French Plan" (New York: Fred F. French Investing Co., 1928) and "New Ownership Plan for Tenants," *New York Times*, April 15, 1923, p. 2.

²¹ "French Organizes \$50,000,000 Concern," *New York Times*, October 30, 1928, p. 52.

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under construction, French began Knickerbocker Village by assembling slum acreage (in this case, a "lung block," so named for the prevalence of tuberculosis). The new residential complex was initially designed for occupancy by Wall Street workers, but was modified by federal funding to include lower income housing. The development was located along the East River, several miles south of its Tudor predecessor. Original plans for Knickerbocker Village consisted of a sprawling forty-acre site between the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges. However, when construction ceased in 1934, barely 25% of the grand scheme had been realized.²²

Although the Depression and other complications prevented Knickerbocker Village from equaling the immediate success of Tudor City, both ventures were remarkable as the largest land parcels ever assembled in Manhattan up until their time.²³ The Fred F. French Building was conceived in 1925 within months of Tudor City's inception. It was completed in October of 1927, just prior to the assemblage of Knickerbocker Village. More than just a center of operations, French's new building on prestigious Fifth Avenue was to be a tangible monument to his success (as its multiple inscriptions and Fred French monograms amply attest). It figured prominently on the masthead of *The Voice*, the French Company's monthly publication, where the French Building served as the centerpiece of other structures by French.

French was married, had four children and countless business contacts, and yet he claimed to have few acquaintances.²⁴ His primary interest was his work. French devoted himself indefatigable to all facets of his business, including primary authorship for many articles in *The Voice* and even daily pep talks to his large staff. Each morning, precisely at nine o'clock, employees gathered in the auditorium of the French Building to hear the Gospel according to their president. He sometimes addressed specific corporate issues, but was more often concerned with attitude and the mentality of success, encouraging his workers with evangelistic zeal to "get smiling into [their] systems." In a very personal interpretation of Christian belief, French commended Christ as "the best salesman of all time" and His life, the "best example of a [successful] sales" pitch.²⁵ He preached the Biblical proverb "Knock and it shall be opened unto you," which in this case, became a motto for unflagging persistence and the refusal to accept "NO" for an answer.

French's absolute dedication continued until 1936 when he died unexpectedly at age 52. Since the completion of his corporate offices some nine years prior, French had occupied the building's twelfth and thirteenth floors (still partially occupied by the firm at this writing). In the months preceding his death French was working in these offices on new developments for Manhattan. Although details of the various schemes were not disclosed, some idea of their scope might be found in one of French's unrealized projects. In December 1929 he announced plans to construct an 83-story building on Sixth Avenue. At

²² Fred F. French, "Knickerbocker Village," scrap book in New York Public Library, 1933-34 [?]. See also Albert Mayer, "A Critique of Knickerbocker Village," *Architecture*, 71 (January, 1935), 5-10.

²³ "First R.F.C. Housing Project," *Architectural Forum*, 58 (May, 1933), p. 435.

²⁴ Murchison, p. 505.

²⁵ Coates, p. 23.

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1,100 feet, the skyscraper would have easily surpassed the Chrysler Building (1,046'; NHL 12-8-76)) which itself had recently eclipsed the Woolworth Building (NHL 11-13-66) as the tallest in the world.²⁶

French was eulogized with fulsome praise for his foresight and skill in property assemblage, but his real genius was recognized as financial. One contemporary critic noted perceptively that French's success would have been impossible "without the vast resources attained through the French Plan."²⁷ The combination of both real estate and financial prowess had placed him among the greatest developers in New York. Yet despite this distinction, French himself technically owned no property. "All of his enterprises were registered under the names of corporations, each formed specifically for building ownership."²⁸

THE FRED F. FRENCH BUILDING

Plans for the Fred F. French Building were filed on August 25, 1925.²⁹ They originally called for a 31-story office building, nearly 385' high. The proposal was altered within a month to include two additional floors, only to have the amended scheme disapproved because its height exceeded the zoning ordinance. In response, Sloan & Robertson petitioned and were granted a variance by the Board of Standards and Appeals.³⁰ In the end, the French Building rose 38' stories including a triplex penthouse for a total height of 416'7". It was the second tallest building in the vicinity, surpassed only by the 432' Harriman Building one block to the south, on the northeast corner of 44th Street and Fifth Avenue (former site of the famous Delmonico's restaurant). Completed by architect H. Craig Severance just five months before the French Building, this classicizing skyscraper proved the perfect foil. Its limestone and buff brick walls emphasized the French Building's rich coloration and exotic decoration while its simple, if imposing, mass underlined the most provocative aspects of French's proto-Art Deco design. In 1927 the two new buildings loomed over low rise Fifth Avenue like the advance guard of its progressive commercialization. They dominated — at least temporarily — the midtown skyline.

Work on the French Building began on May 22, 1926. Its steel skeleton topped off four months later. Had the scheduled completion date been met, the French Building would have been the tallest on midtown Fifth Avenue, but unforeseen delays stalled opening for seven months (October 24, 1927) by which time the Harriman Building had usurped the distinction.³¹ Three years later, in December 1930, H. Douglas Ives filed an application for the conversion of the building's 36th and 37th penthouse floors for use as office space.³² The alteration was in keeping with French's primary intention to exploit the site's full development potential and thereby maximize its rental value.

²⁶ "French Will Erect Sixth-Avenue Skyscraper," *Real Estate Record and Guide*, December 21, 1929, p. 8. See also "City Rebuilding Needs Public Aid," *New York Times*, January 26, 1930, sec. 11, p. 2.

²⁷ French. Obituary [*Real Estate Record and Guide*], p. 1.

²⁸ "Fred F. French Wrought Vast Changes In Manhattan's East Side Skyline," *New York Times*, September 6, 1936, sec. 9, p. 1.

²⁹ NB518-25.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ NB532-25 (Harriman Building). See also "\$10,000,000 French Project to be Ready March, 1927," *Real Estate Record and Guide*, July 17, 1926, p. 7.

³² ALT1804-30.

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The French Building was praised in its day as "one of the most notable achievements in architectural design...as well as an excellent example of the extensive use of electricity in large buildings." Technologically innovative, it was equipped with such modern devices as an electric plumbing system with variable speed motors, conveniently controlled lighting and ventilation, and most notably, an automatic, self-leveling elevator system which "approach[ed] perfection as nearly as anything [could]."³³ Beyond its technological efficiency, the building was prized for its prime location and elegant decoration as well as its planning excellence, and was commended by the Building Planning Service of the National Association of Building Owners and Managers for "the most complete" plans it had ever seen.³⁴ The structure was also praised as a creative response to the Building Code of 1916. In short, the French Building was "one of the most popular business palaces in the entire midtown section."³⁵

The Building Code had been enacted to ensure adequate amounts of light and air for buildings and pedestrians at street level. In compliance, tall structures were arranged in tiers, producing more three-dimensional buildings. Tapered towers, set back from their bases, now became freestanding sculptural forms, with all four elevations exposed. Not surprisingly, the Building Code brought about a greater attention to silhouette. Prior to this legislation urban architectural design was largely a question of articulating a single planar facade, or two when a building occupied a corner site. The stepped masses now legally required gave birth to "a distinctly American type of architecture" about whose "mass and stamina" contemporary critics frequently rhapsodized.³⁶ Set back buildings were valued for being "different from anything ever seen before, and what's more, beautiful. The change in mass and form [was observed as rapidly and silently revolutionizing the entire [city] fabric."³⁷ Writing in 1923, architectural critic George Edgell declared the new zoning law "the most interesting single phenomenon in American architecture" of his era.³⁸ There was little significant construction in the years immediately after World War I and thus the conspicuous impact of the 1916 Building Code was delayed. Its dramatic potential was popularized almost single-handedly by the architectural draftsman Hugh Ferriss whose series of enormously influential "zoning envelopes" was published as illustrations to an article in the *New York Times* on March 19, 1922.³⁹

One of the earliest concrete manifestations of the Building Code appeared in the award winning Shelton Hotel (re-christened the Halloran House In 1978). It was executed on Lexington Avenue between 48th and 49th Streets by Arthur Loomis Harmon (who, six years later, was associated with Richmond Shreve and William Lamb on the design of the Empire State Building, 1930-32.) A severely imposing structure arranged in three major setbacks, the 34-story Shelton was the tallest hotel in the world. It was completed

³³ "Confidence Justified," *The Voice*, 2 (January, 1928), p. 4.

³⁴ "Rapid Progress Made in Construction of 551 Fifth Avenue," *The Voice*, 1 (July, 1926), p. 1.

³⁵ Chase, p. 245.

³⁶ "The Origin of the Setback," *American Architect*, 131 (May 5, 1927), p. 605.

³⁷ Park, p. 148.

³⁸ George Edgell, *The American Architecture of Today* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1928, p. 356.

³⁹ Hugh Ferriss, "The New Architecture: Evolution of a City Building Under the Zoning Law," *New York Times*, March 19, 1922, sec. 3, p. 8.

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to great fanfare in March, 1923.⁴⁰ Plans for the French Building were filed two years later. Taller and much more animated than the Shelton, it was one of the boldest and most creative responses to the Building Code that had yet appeared.

Because of the French Building's location on an irregular corner site, it was controlled by the different zoning regulations governing Fifth Avenue and narrower 45th Street. The attempt at both legal compliance and rental maximization led to the building's four distinctly different elevations, each developed to zoning and site limitations. So complete was the French Building's embodiment of the Building Code that its photograph was included in the *American Heritage Dictionary* as a classic illustration of the word "setback."⁴¹ Its lofty rectangular tower rests atop a pyramidal base, which is massed above the eleventh floor like so many boxes piled high. Later buildings would respond to the Building Code more soberly, with fewer, larger and simpler setbacks.

With the development of skeletal framing grew the aesthetic of great height and the need for practical as well as expressive curtain walls. This was particularly true, as the Building Code had also restricted projections of more than eighteen inches from a facade, a measure that weaned architects from such classical ornament as boldly protruding cornices and freestanding sculpture.

Like Cass Gilbert at the Woolworth Building and Raymond Hood at the Chicago Tribune, many architects found Gothic an attractive alternative, its characteristic verticality lending itself easily to the lofty modern skyscraper. Romanesque offered another promising solution, as Sloan had demonstrated at the Pershing Square Building. Ives and Sloan & Robertson had considered both of these medieval styles for the French Building.⁴² Indeed, they executed French's executive offices in a Tudor motif (complementing the broad medievalism of his contemporaneous residential development at Tudor City).⁴³ Ultimately the architects abandoned their medieval cladding proposal, and articulated the French Building in the less expensive, more exotic (and conspicuous) Near Eastern aesthetic of polychromed mural surfaces.

Contemporary critics applauded architectural polychromy for its positive psychological effect. Color, they claimed, relieved "the sense of confusion in the street, and the sense of oppression of tall building."⁴⁴ It provided a strong decorative quality without depending on the three-dimensional projections to which the Building Code objected while simultaneously compensating for the loss of contrasting lights and shadows. Because Near Eastern architects had little native stone, they had relied on terra cotta tiles for structural as well as ornamental needs. The "breadth and simplicity" of the solution was particularly appealing to

⁴⁰ NB291-22. See also Claude Bragdon, "The Shelton Hotel, New York," *Architectural Record*, 58 (July 1925), 1-18.

⁴¹ *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969 [1981]), p. 1186. Cited by John Tauranac, *Essential New York* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1979), p. 155.

⁴² H. Douglas Ives, "The Architecture of the French Building," *The Voice*, 1 (February, 1927), p. 4.

⁴³ Carol Herselle Krinsky, "The Fred F. French Building; Mesopotamia in Manhattan," *Antiques*, 121 (January 1982), 289-90, pls. IV-VI.

⁴⁴ Parker Morse Hooper, "Modern Architectural Decoration," *Architectural Forum*, 48 (February, 1927), p. 4.

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modern architects who, in the last throes of historicism, simultaneously explored the new functional aesthetic. Ives himself justified its application at the French Building when he wrote that:

Color has always played an important role in the architecture of the East and Far East, so it was natural we should turn to the early work of these countries for our guidance. As the likeness of the mass of the French Building recalled strongly the form of Assyrian ziggurats, or observation towers, such as the Tower of the Seven Planets at Babylon, the walls of each terrace of which were built entirely of enameled brick in various colors, we felt we might safely adapt these Assyrian or Chaldean forms of ornament which were peculiarly suitable to flat surfaces.⁴⁵

Because of its pronounced Near Eastern influence the French Building has been called New York's only Mesopotamian skyscraper.⁴⁶ But rather than comprising a distinct architectural style, these exotic allusions are better seen as part of the multiple forces at work in architectural design of the late 1920s. Interest in Egypt and the Near East (heightened in 1922 by Howard Carter's momentous discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb) coincided with inspiration from France, Vienna, contemporary films, the new machine aesthetic, and other sources, including Mayan civilization.

Theorists and architects alike recognized the similarities wrought by the Building Code with Mesoamerican and Near Eastern tombs and temples. Harvey Corbett, for instance, predicted that American cities would someday resemble a vast collection of Egyptian pyramids, while others recommended the stepped prototypes for their logical geometric form and effective polychromatic ornament.⁴⁷ The latter aspect was especially advanced by Ely Jacques Kahn in such buildings as the Furniture Exchange (1926) at 206 Lexington Avenue and most conspicuously, in the 2 Park Avenue Building which was completed in November, 1927, just one month after the French Building.⁴⁸ Other manifestations of the same exotic influences appeared in New York, for example, in the decoration of the Chrysler Building (1929-30), in several large contemporaneous apartment houses by Schwarz & Gross and more subtly, in the Egyptianizing aspects of Rockefeller Center (NHL 12-23-87) where buildings were further enriched by the modern corporate equivalent of Babylon's rooftop gardens.

Like most skyscrapers, the French Building was designed for visibility at both close range and from a distance. As the principal aim of its decorative program was to advertise the Fred French Company, ornament was placed where it would best be seen: at the top of the tower, along the building's multiple

⁴⁵ Ives, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Krinsky, p. 191.

⁴⁷ See "Setback Buildings Growing in Favor," *New York Times*, June 24, 1923, sec. 2, p. 6; Rose Henderson, "A Primitive Basis for Modern Architecture," *Architectural Record*, 54 (August, 1923), 189-96 and Marjorie I. Ingle, *The Mayan Revival: Art Deco Mayan Fantasy* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1984), esp. p. 51-56; "The Origin of the Setback," *American Architect*, 131 (May 5, 1927), 605-8, and Hooper, p. 153-173.

⁴⁸ NB499-26. See also Leon V. Solon, "The Park Avenue Building, New York City," *Architectural Record*, 63 (April, 1928), 289-97.

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Section 8 Page 11

Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

setbacks and especially in the ground level entrances and commercial bays, all of which were lavishly embellished in bronze. Because decoration, and not archaeological veracity, was the primary consideration, Ives and Sloan & Robertson made no attempt at historical accuracy. Within the French, Building's general Mesopotamian character there exists a wide array of Near Eastern and classical motifs.

The selection of the French Building's style was primarily an exterior consideration, yet great attention was paid to its continuation — indeed, elaboration — in the public areas of the first floor interior. According to the French Company's Voice, the lobby of an office building was "suggestive of the cleanliness, willingness, capability and fair-mindedness of the management." In short, it was an advertisement for the owner — an aspect emphasized at the French Building by the multiple decorative monograms of its namesake founder. With its lavish gilt-bronze ornament, polychromatic vault decorations and gleaming marble walls, the lobby of the French Building lent itself easily to description as a "commercial palace." It is embellished throughout with a wide array of not only Near Eastern motifs, but also classical and incipient Art Deco flourishes. Decoration, not archaeological veracity, was the architects' primary aim. Ives and Sloan & Robertson made no attempt at historical accuracy.

THE ARCHITECTS

Fred French's personal involvement in his business included basic architectural design (although the extent of his input has not been determined). Contemporaries recalled how he "dash[ed] up to the drafting room [to lay] out an apartment house or an office building. A plan, French claimed, "was the only fun he [got] out of life."⁴⁹ Under normal circumstances, the building was then worked up by staff architects under H. Douglas Ives. To the dismay of the architectural community, French did not employ outside designers. His new corporate headquarters, however, proved an exception. Intended as a potent architectural statement, corporate (and personal) advertisement, as well as a profitable investment, French strayed from his normal policy and engaged the firm of Sloan & Robertson as consulting architects. Clyde R. Place was employed as consulting engineer.⁵⁰

The division of labor among the various architects is unclear, but it appears likely that Sloan & Robertson had primary responsibility for the French Building's design. Although their partnership was only a year old when plans were filed in 1925, both men (aged 37 and 47 respectively) had distinguished themselves as skilled designers, particularly in the Grand Central Zone. In previous partnership with his father, Thomas Markoe Robertson (1878-1962) had amassed considerable experience in office building design while John Sloan (1888-1954) had recently gained prominence as the architect of the Perching Square Building.

Sloan & Robertson's success as consulting architects of the French Building may have led to their commission for the Chanin Building (NR-listed 4-23-80). Begun in 1927 when the French Building was still under construction, it was executed as the corporate headquarters for one of Fred French's major

⁴⁹ Murchison, p. 505.

⁵⁰ "The French Building, New York City," *Architecture and Building*, 59, (October, 1927), 320, and pls. 209-10.

United States Department of the Interior
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Section 8 Page 12

Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
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competitors.⁵¹ Significantly, Irwin S. Chanin, like French, deviated from his normal in-house design policy to commission Sloan & Robertson. For him they erected a 57-story Art Deco building on 42nd Street (just three blocks south of the French Building — and surpassing it by nineteen floors). In spite of their differences, the two structures are nonetheless similar as a brick tower atop a pyramidal base with bronze framed shop fronts, decorative bronze fascia and terra cotta ornament. A related commission was the neighboring thirty-story Graybar Building on 42nd Street.⁵² Completed in 1927, it offered a million square feet of space, making it the largest (but not the tallest) office building in the world. Like the French Building, the Graybar has an eclectic ornamental scheme with strong Near Eastern influence. And like the Chanin, it was executed for one of French's rivals, in this case, Todd, Robertson & Todd.

In what was by now a pattern, the firm engaged Sloan & Robertson over design by staff architects. As a result of their success at the Graybar and other modern office buildings (most notably the Cunard), Todd, Robertson & Todd won the privileged role in 1928 as developers of Rockefeller Center. H. Douglas Ives, by contrast, most likely supervised construction in addition to making valuable contributions regarding the French Company's requirements. A skilled designer in his own right, he had been head architect of the French Company for approximately one year and was doubtless in close contact with its president. Ives later repeated the general setback massing of the French Building in the Hotel Tudor, which he built in 1930-32 as the twelfth unit of Tudor City.

H. Douglas Ives

H. Douglas Ives was born in Montreal, Canada in 1888.⁵³ He received his architectural education and practiced in Toronto until 1914, when he served in Europe with the Canadian military forces. After World War I, Ives relocated to New York. He was employed for a period by Cass Gilbert, but subsequently established an independent practice. By 1924-25 (when Ives was first listed in the New York City directory), he had already joined the Fred F. French Company. He served as its chief designer for ten years, executing not only the French Building, but also the Hotel Everglades in Miami, and most of the buildings in Tudor City, as well as other apartment and commercial buildings for French. In addition, Ives worked for French's concerns in London. A member of the Architectural League of New York, Ives was associated in 1944 with T.E. Rhoades, a local building contractor and engineer. Their brief collaboration terminated with Ives' death in the following year (1945).

Sloan & Robertson

Born in New York in 1888 and professionally trained at New York University, John Sloan went into business for himself in 1905, at age 21.⁵⁴ Three years later, he moved to the Philippine Islands as Architect

⁵¹ Work on the Chanin Building began in 1927 and was completed on January 23, 1929. See the Chanin Building Designation Report, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, LP-0993.

⁵² "Graybar Building," *The Architect*, 9 (November, 1927), 197-202.

⁵³ H. Douglas Ives. Obituary. *New York Times*, August 15, 1945. See also Henry F. and Elsie R. Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), p. 317.

⁵⁴ John Sloan. Obituary. *New York Times*, June 26, 1954, p. 13. See also W. Parker Chase, *New York, The Wonder City* (New York; Wonder City Publishing Co., 1930), p. 113 and Sloan's obituary in the *Michigan Society of Architects Monthly Bulletin*, 23 (September, 1954), p. 15.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 13

Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
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and Superintendent of Construction for the War Department. During World War I Sloan did construction work for the American Expeditionary Force in France, and also served as a member of the Army Air Service Advisory Board in Washington. He returned to private practice in 1920 when he became associated with York & Sawyer on the design of the Pershing Square Building. The new structure was located at 100 East 42nd Street on the southeast corner of Park Avenue, just one block north of French's first corporate headquarters at 41st and Madison Avenue. The Pershing Square Building received a good deal of attention, particularly for its tone-varied brick and terra cotta ornament, an aesthetic that Sloan quickly repeated at an apartment house at 898 Park Avenue (1923).⁵⁵ Sloan leased space in the Pershing Square Building in 1923, and in the following year opened an office there with his new partner, Thomas Markoe Robertson.

Robertson was born in 1878 to the eminent late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century architect, Robert H. Robertson.⁵⁶ He graduated from Yale in 1901 and subsequently trained at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Father and son formed a partnership (R.H. Robertson & Son) in 1908 and practiced together until the former died in 1919. Thereafter Thomas Markoe Robertson collaborated with noted theater architect Henry B. Herts on plans for a Victory Memorial entertainment and sports complex.⁵⁷ An ambitious Beaux Arts project, it was designed to complement Grand Central Terminal which it was to face on the south (on the entire block between 41st and 42nd Streets, Park and Lexington Avenues. The venture ultimately collapsed under economic pressures and, several years later, John Sloan erected the Pershing Square Building on the proposed Victory Memorial site.

During Sloan & Robertson's extended association, Sloan was responsible for the engineering and financial promotion of the firm's work. Specializing in institutional and commercial buildings, most frequently of Art Deco design, the firm's most notable commissions included the \$30,000,000 Wards Island Sewerage Disposal Plant, Rikers Island Penitentiary, and the East Terminus at Montauk, Long Island. In Manhattan, they executed the Maritime Exchange Building at 80 Broad Street, an office building at 29 Broadway, the Plaza Building at 625 Madison Avenue, the Women's House of Detention in Greenwich Village (demolished) and apartment houses at 1 Beekman Place and 895 Park Avenue, as well as the annex to the St. Regis Hotel. Sloan had also designed the West Side Highway (1930) between Canal and 72nd Streets (partially demolished). The works that established Sloan & Robertson as leading skyscraper designers, however, were the Chanin and Graybar buildings both of which were prefigured by the French Building.

CONCLUSION

Built in 1926-27 during New York's greatest building boom, the Fred F. French Building is a significant example of distinctive corporate imagery and a monument to one of New York's greatest developers. It was the personal enterprise of Fred French who, through his multi-faceted real estate and construction companies, oversaw its every detail from property assemblage, to design, construction, financing, leasing

⁵⁵ "Pershing Square Building," *American Architect*, 124 (October 10, 1923), 319-24.

⁵⁶ Thomas Markoe Robertson. Obituary. *New York Times*, August 3, 1962. p. 23. See also "Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report" Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1981, vol. 2, p. 1326-28, 1346-47.

⁵⁷ Charles Over Cornelius, "War Memorials," *Architectural Record*, 47 (January 1920), 41-43.

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Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
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and promotion. As one of the earliest and loftiest towers on Fifth Avenue above 42nd Street the building is important for the role it played in the development of the midtown commercial zone. It is notable as a creative response to the Building Code of 1916, and is distinguished for its accomplished blend of lingering historicism and vanguard modernism. It is also unique for its skyline iconography and for its lavish polychromatic and bronze ornament of Near Eastern inspiration. After nearly sixty years the Fred F. French Building survives substantially intact as one of the finest examples in New York of late 1920s exotic architectural design.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 1

Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
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Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
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Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

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Fred F. French Building
Name of Property

New York County, New York
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 586126 4511906
Zone Easting Northing

3 18
Zone Easting Northing

2 18

4 18

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By (**See Continuation Sheet**)

name/title Contact: Kathy Howe, Historic Preservation Specialist
organization New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Field Services Bureau date August 26, 2003
street & number P.O. Box 189, Peebles Island telephone 518-237-8643, ext. 3266
city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188-0189

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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

Photographs

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

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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

name The Feil Organization, Attn: Jay Anderson
street & number 370 Seventh Avenue telephone 212-563-6557
city or town New York state NY zip code 10001

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

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of this nomination is outlined on the accompanying Sanborn Map. The boundaries of the nominated property are established by Block 1281, Lot 1.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire footprint of the nominated structure.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 11 Page 1

Fred F. French Building
Name of Property
New York County, New York
County and State

Form Prepared by:

Heather McGrath
Historic Preservationist
Building Conservation Associates
158 West 27th Street
New York, New York 10001
212-777-1300

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

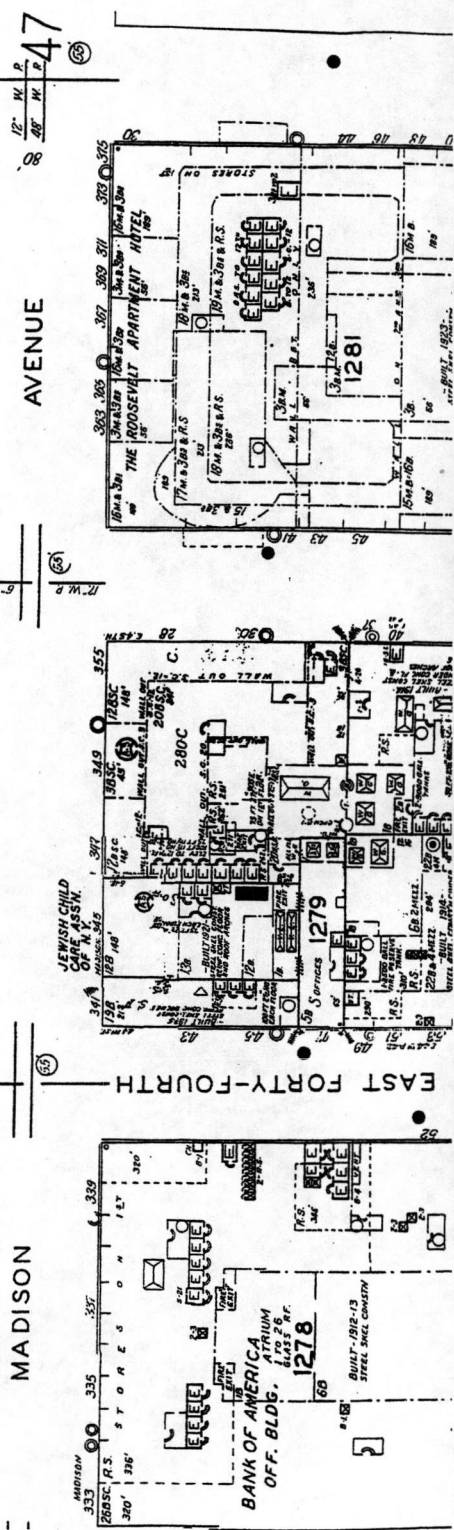
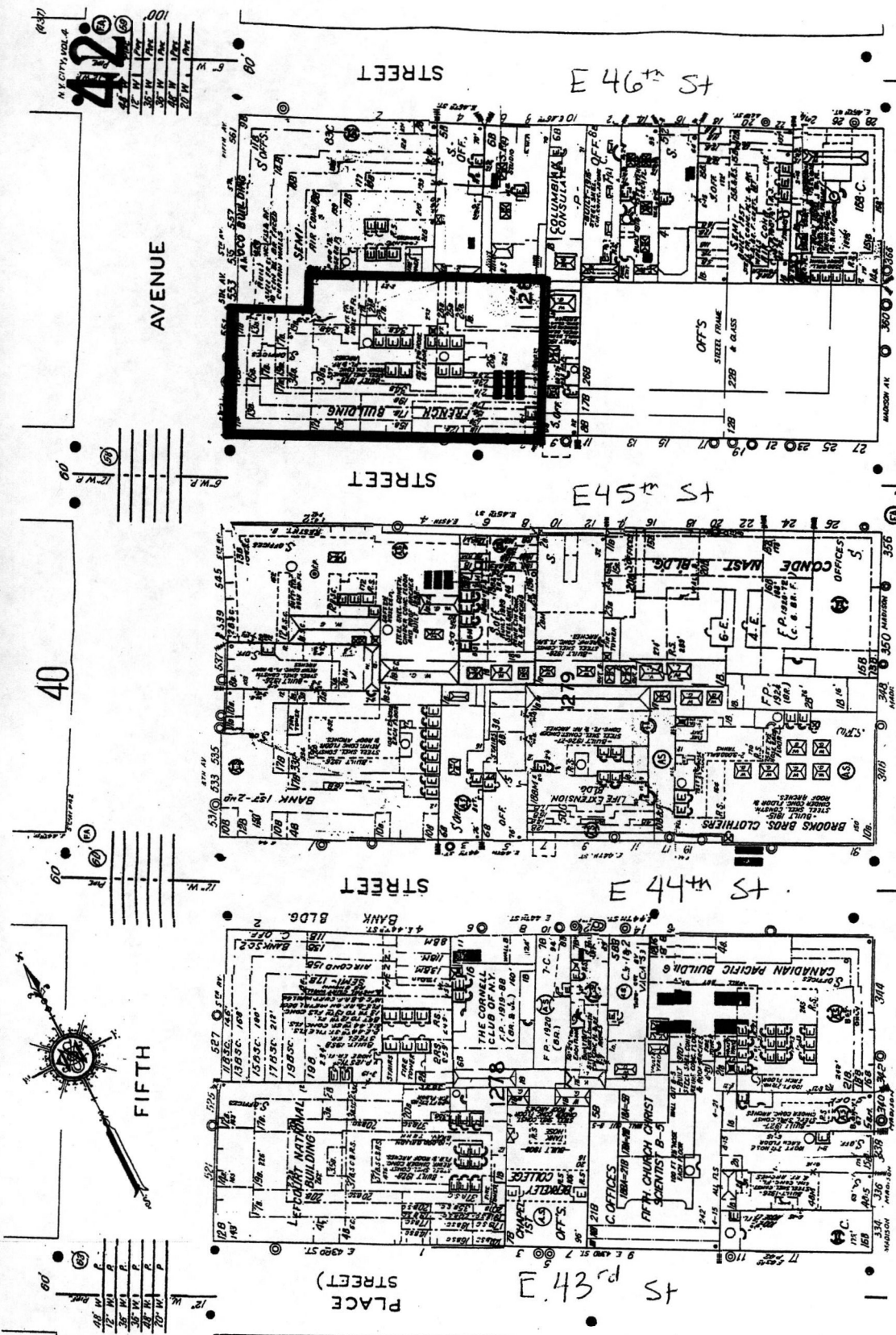
Maps

Sanborn Map.
USGS Topo Map.

Photographs

Fred F. French Building
551 Fifth Avenue
New York County, NY
Photographer: Heather McGrath
Date: July 2003
Location of negatives: Building Conservation Associates, 158 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001

1. View of the west and south facades above the third floor looking northeast.
2. View of the first through third floors at the west and south facades looking northeast.
3. View of the first through third floors, including the storefronts and Fifth Avenue entrance at the west facade looking east.
4. Detail view of the west facade including face brick, terracotta ornament, metal spandrel panels, and steel windows looking east.
5. Detail of the terracotta ornament at the south facade of the tower, looking south.
6. Detail of the terracotta ornament at the water tower of the west facade, looking east.
7. View of the 45th Street entrance foyer looking southeast.
8. View of the 45th Street entrance foyer looking northeast.
9. View of the elevator lobby at the ground floor looking northeast.
10. View of the long corridor from the elevator lobby to the Fifth Avenue entrance foyer looking west.
11. View of the corridor from the Fifth Avenue entrance to the elevator lobby looking east.
12. Detail of the ceiling in the corridor from Fifth Avenue entrance to the elevator lobby.
13. View of the elevator lobby at the 12th floor looking northeast.



Fred F. French Building
 551 Fifth Avenue
 New York County, NY

Boundary indicated by dark line
 Block 1281, Lot 1
 Sanborn Map, 2002
 Scale 1" = 100'

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY French, Fred F., Building
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, New York

DATE RECEIVED: 12/19/03 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/06/04
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 1/21/04 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/01/04
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 03001514

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

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

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 1/28/04 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

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



Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ Co, NY
Photograph 1



Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ Co., N.Y.
Photograph 2

THE FRED F. FRENCH BUILDING

THE FRENCH BUILDING



Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ Co, NY
Photographs



Fred F. French Building
New York ~~NY~~ Co, NY
Photograph 4



Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ Co, NY. J
Photograph 5



Fred F. French Building
New York ~~NY~~ Co., NY
Photograph 6



Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ Co, NY
Photograph 7



THE FRENCH BUILDING
FIFTH AVENUE

S...
& D...
P...
Y...
O...
C...
S...

Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ Co, N.Y.
Photograph 8



Fred F. French Building
New York ~~NY~~ Co, N.Y.)
Photograph 9



Fred F. French Building
New York ~~NY~~ Co, NY
Photograph 10



Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ Co, NY
Photograph 11



Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ County, NY
Photograph 12



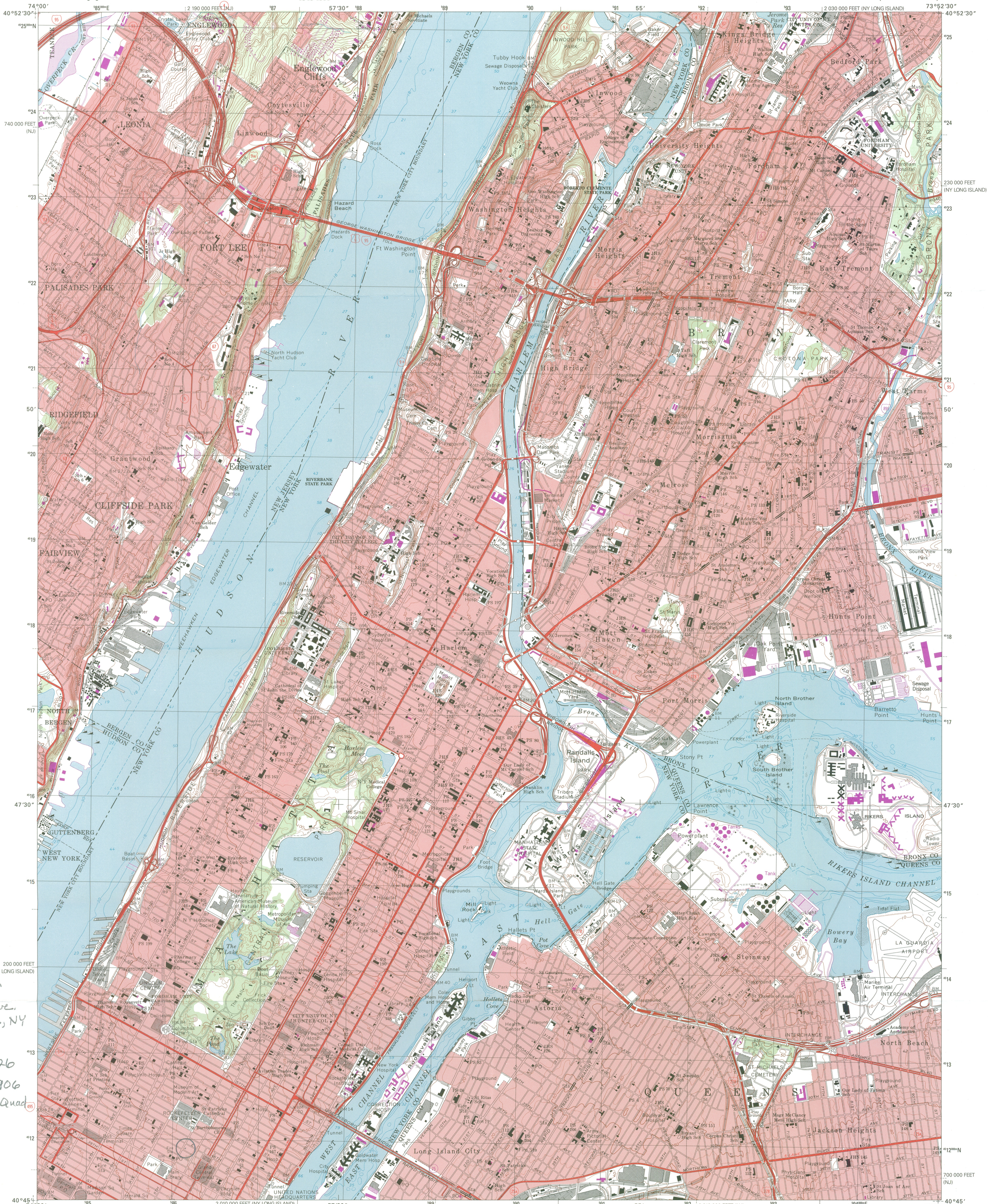
Fred F. French Building
New York, ~~NY~~ Co, NY
Photograph 13



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

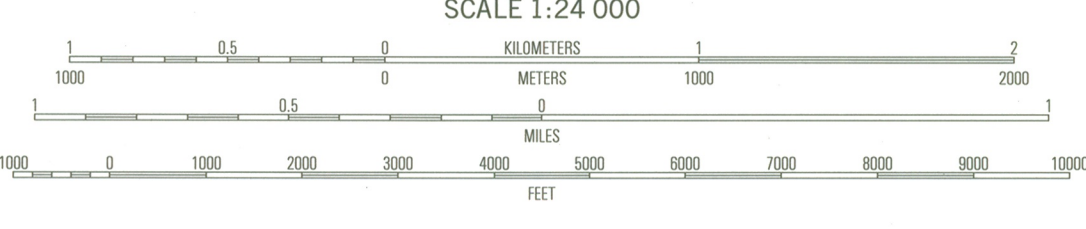


CENTRAL PARK QUADRANGLE
NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY
7.5-MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



Fred F. French
Building
551 Fifth Ave.
New York Co., NY
Zone 18
Easting 586126
Northing 4511906
Central Park Quad
USGS
1:24000

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Topography compiled 1966. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1977 and other sources. Photorevised using imagery dated 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1966. Boundaries, other than corporate, revised 1999.
Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS charts 226, 274, 745, 746, and 747 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes.
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27)
Projection: New York coordinate system, Long Island zone (transverse Mercator)
10 000-foot ticks: New York coordinate system, Long Island zone and New Jersey coordinate system
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 18
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software.
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map.
Information shown in purple may not meet USGS content standards and may conflict with previously mapped contours.



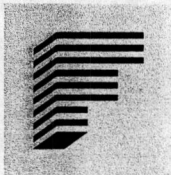
ROAD CLASSIFICATION	
Primary highway hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

CENTRAL PARK, NY-NJ
1995

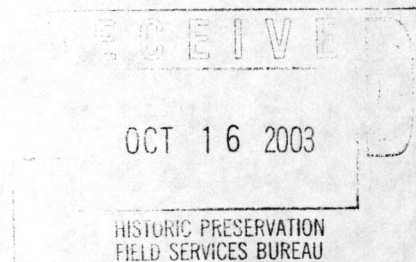
NIMA 6265 IV SW-SERIES V821





THE FEIL ORGANIZATION

Seven Penn Plaza
New York, NY 10001
212.563.6557
212.563.6657 Fax



September 3, 2003

Ms. Kathy Howe
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Field Services Bureau
P.O. Box 189
Peebles Island
Waterford, NY 12188

Re: The Fred F. French Building/551 Fifth Avenue, NYC

Dear Ms. Howe,

As representative of the owners of the above referenced property, I am writing to you to convey their unqualified support that the building be included in the New York State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further comment on this matter.

Sincerely,
The Feil Organization

Jay Anderson
Executive Vice President



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

1 Centre Street, 9th Floor North, New York NY 10007 TEL: 212-669-7922 FAX: 212-669-7797
<http://nyc.gov/landmarks/>



RONDA WIST
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
rwist@lpc.nyc.gov

October 16, 2003

Ms. Ruth Pierpont, Director
New York State Office of Parks Recreation
and Historic Preservation
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Peebles Island
P.O. Box 189
Waterford, New York 12188-0189

Re: Fred F. French Building, 551 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York

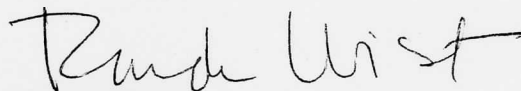
Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of the Fred F. French Building at 551 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The Commission supports the nomination of the Fred F. French Building. On March 18, 1986, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission voted to designate the Fred F. French Building an individual New York City landmark. The Fred F. French Building is a significant example of distinctive corporate imagery dating from the era of New York's greatest building boom. A proto-Art Deco design, with strong Near Eastern influences, it represents the stylistic compromise between lingering historicism and the modernistic trends that typified the architecture of the late 1920s.

Therefore, based on the Commission's review of the property and the materials submitted by the Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau, the Commission has determined that the Fred F. French Building appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Sincerely yours,


Ronda Wist

cc: Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Mary Beth Betts