

May 17, 2022



Hon. Sarah Carroll,  
Chair NYC Landmarks Commission  
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Additional research regarding Fifth Avenue Corridor in the proposed historic district South of Union Square**

Dear Chair Carroll,

I write to share with you some very significant new information from research we have performed on the buildings along Fifth Avenue within the proposed South of Union Square Historic District. This supplements the substantial research and information already submitted in our [April 7, 2020](#) letter regarding these buildings, their history, and their relationship to the broader proposed district. The buildings along this corridor are both architecturally striking and bear great cultural significance, and this additional information along with that already provided to the Commission speaks to the urgent need to protect them and the larger surrounding district.

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(l. to r.) 72, 74, 78, and 80 Fifth Avenue, 1940

(l. to r.) 72, 74, 78, and 80 Fifth Avenue, ca. 2021

**Fighting for Civil Rights at 80 Fifth Avenue:** In 1907, Buchman & Fox debuted their plans for the striking 16-story elaborately detailed Renaissance Revival style office building at 80-82 Fifth Avenue that would be dubbed by the Real Estate Records and Builders Guide in 1907 as “14th Street’s First Skyscraper.” The building features elaborate show windows, light stone, terracotta, and copper details. The building was constructed by Hedden Construction Co., and the Milliken Bros completed the building’s steel and ironwork.

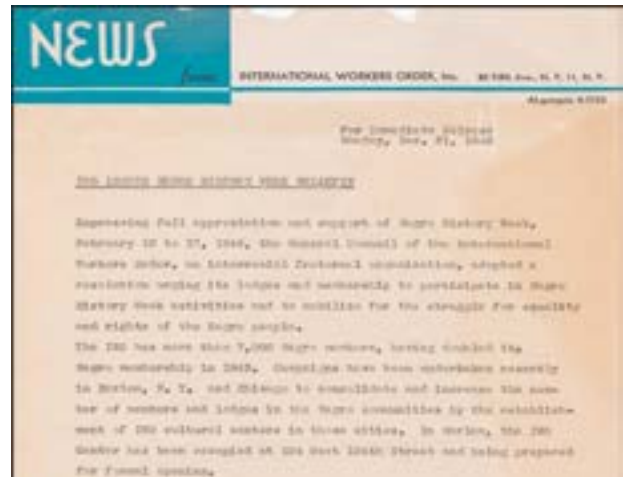
As per prior submissions, when completed the building housed the headquarters of the nation’s first gay rights organization, and trailblazing labor, civil rights, and social justice organizations. We have previously written about the International Workers Orders (IWO). This fraternal organization was present here between 1930 and 1954. We have uncovered papers from the office of the director of the IWO, Sam Milgrom, who

worked out of the headquarters at 80 Fifth Avenue, which sheds additional light on this trailblazing organization's contributions to history.



(r. to l.) 80, 78, 74, and 72 Fifth Avenue 1923 (r. to l.) 80, 78, 74, and 72 Fifth Avenue 2022

Black History week, or “Negro History Week,” was begun in 1926 by the noted Black historian and educator Carter G. Woodson. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Sam Milgrom of the IWO saw the importance of teaching and celebrating black history, and recognized it as unmistakably a part of American history that should be recognized as such. Milgrom wrote to all the National Societies in the IWO across the United States and urged them to participate in the celebration of “Negro History Week.” He gave several pointers on how the Societies might go about celebrating this history. Milgrom encouraged the National Societies to invite Black leaders or educators to speak at their meetings on current issues, write articles for their group paper on racial solidarity and integration, and encourage members to get involved in activities in Black communities. Sam Milgrom stated in 1945 that “full equality of the Negro people is a basic task for democracy for all.” [New York Age, 1945].



IWO Newsletter, 80 Fifth Avenue, December 31, 1945

In addition to his work advocating for Black equality, Sam Milgrom consistently spoke and encouraged members to uphold the ideals of American democracy, freedom, and love of country. He also advocated for the Jewish fraternal organizations to publish their magazine amidst growing Anti-Semitism. Sam Milgrom, a Russian immigrant, was denaturalized and deported to Minsk.

Milgrom was deported on the grounds of involvement with the Communist Party. Milgrom's work with the IWO was unique in his steadfast support for African American civil rights and providing a progressive voice for Jewish people, and illustrates the confluence of the arts and civil rights and social justice movements found throughout the proposed South of Union Square Historic District.

**Female Engineers at 78 Fifth Avenue:** This ten-story Neo-Renaissance-style loft building, designed in 1896 by architect Albert Wagner, housed the offices of trailblazing women engineers who helped build some of the most prominent New



78 Fifth Avenue, 2022

York City skyscrapers of the era. Shortly after the building's opening in 1897, Purdy & Henderson, the prominent Chicago structural engineering firm, located their main offices here. While here, the firm worked on such iconic New York City landmarks as Cass Gilbert's Broadway Chambers building (1900), De Lemos & Cordes's Macy's Department Store (1902), Daniel Burnham's Fulleror Flatiron Building (1903), Cyrus L. W.

Eidlitz's New York Times building (1904), Henry J. Hardenbergh's Plaza Hotel (1907), Napoleon Le Brun & Son's Metropolitan Life Insurance Company tower (1909) – the tallest building in the world for four years — the Whitehall Annex (1910), and McKim, Mead & White's Pennsylvania Train Station (1911), in addition to the Reed & Stern and Warren & Wetmore collaborative project for the Grand Central Terminal (1913).

It wasn't solely the work of Corydon Tyler Purdy and Lightner Henderson that was winning these contracts and completing the complex calculations necessary to keep our iconic buildings standing over 100 years later. Two female engineers, Marion S. Parker and Elmina Wilson, who worked for Purdy & Henderson, were instrumental in many of these commissions. Marion S. Parker was first employed by the firm in Chicago following her graduation from the University of Michigan. In 1900, she came to New York City, where she assisted on the Flatiron's design and was solely responsible for the Broad-Exchange and the Whitehall buildings. In an interview with the New York Press in July of 1905, Ms. Parker recalled her coworkers saying she "works like a man," and she was okay with that, as she was making as much as a man did.



The Flatiron under Construction, 1901-02

The other female structural engineer working at 78 Fifth Avenue was Elmina Wilson. Wilson was a graduate of Iowa State University, where she became the first female engineering professor after graduation. From there, she went to travel across Europe to study architecture. She returned to the United States in 1904, gaining employment with the James E. Brooks Company. In 1906, after briefly working for the Department



of Agriculture, she came to also work for Purdy & Henderson. She was responsible for designing the Whitehall Annex, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Building (then the world's tallest building), and the Manhattan Municipal Building with the firm. Parker and Wilson's groundbreaking accomplishments highlight the marriage of social progress and commerce found throughout the proposed South of Union Square Historic District.



Manhattan Municipal Building 1909-14

### **A Philanthropic Immigrant at 68 Fifth**

**Avenue:** Just south of the recently landmarked 70 Fifth Avenue stands this Greek Revival row house constructed c. 1838-40 by John H. Cornell, believed to be a high-ranking officer at the Mechanic's Banking Association on Wall Street. The building is a five-story three-bay rowhouse with a detailed intact cornice and lintels.



(l. to r.) 64-66, 68, and 70 Fifth Avenue 1940 (l. to r.) 64-66, 68, and 70 Fifth Avenue 2021

In 1868, this rowhouse was purchased by Irish immigrant Andrew Carrigan. After immigrating to the United States from Ireland between 1821 and 1822 with nothing in his pocket, Carrigan amassed a fortune through provisions dealing. When he retired in 1868 and settled into his home on Fifth Avenue, he had used his fortune to help his fellow immigrants, the city, and the country he now called home.

The main issues Carrigan sought to tackle were those facing immigrants. The first was the uncertainty immigrants met when arriving on the shores of New York. Immigrants gave away their money or few worldly possessions to people waiting at the docks to take advantage of their often desperate positions. These swindlers offered promises of housing, jobs, and safety to the immigrants with no follow-through. To end this, Carrigan helped establish the New York Commission of Emigration, the immigrant processing center at Castle Clinton, in 1855, which created a safe and closely regulated system for admitting immigrants to the city and country

and getting them acculturated.

Once immigrants settled in New York and began to make money, many banks took advantage of their naïveté, taking their money, claiming it had been lost, stolen, or never brought there. As President of the Irish Emigrant Society, Carrigan helped establish the Emigrant Savings Bank in 1850, which sought to protect immigrants' money, allowing them to feel a sense of security, send money back to Ireland, or help bring more of their families or communities from Ireland to the United States. The Emigrant Savings Bank is the oldest Savings Bank in New York City and, until recently, was the ninth-largest privately-owned bank in the United States. The bank also collected tremendous volumes of genealogical records (now held in the New York Public Library), which can help thousands of Irish-Americans trace their lineage back to Ireland.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Carrigan was the co-founder and Executive Committee member of the Irish Brigade. This Irish-American division served along with the Union Soldiers during the Civil War. The Irish fought bravely alongside American soldiers and suffered gruesome losses. In Gettysburg, one soldier wrote, "Irish blood and Irish bones cover that terrible field today...We are slaughtered like sheep," Some Irishmen joined through loyalty to the cause; many joined to counteract the idea that Irishmen and immigrants were not and could not be American. Though their intentions may have been questioned, their resilience on the battlefield helped the North win many battles. Carrigan's legacy throws into relief the currents of immigration, philanthropy, social progress, and commerce embodied throughout the proposed South of Union Square Historic District.

**The Rebellious Spirit of Modern Dance at 64-66 Fifth Avenue:** No. 64-66 Fifth Avenue is an 8-story commercial loft building that was built in three stages — in 1892 by architect R.H. Robertson, with additions in 1907 and 1915. The building features a brick face with arched windows, a slate roof, and large attic windows.

We have previously written highlighting the significance of the building as the first and longtime home of the Martha Graham dance studio in our [letter on May 7, 2020](#). Our latest research however also shows that Anna Sokolow, another revolutionary dancer, worked, studied, and taught here. Sokolow had an extraordinary influence on the world of dance, drawing inspiration from her own life and the challenges she saw throughout the 20th century. Her style, work ethic, and uncompromising look at social issues earned her the nickname "the rebellious spirit" of modern dance.



64-66 Fifth Avenue, 1940



Program Nov 14, 1937

Anna Sokolow was highly motivated by the labor movement during the Great Depression. She is regarded as one of the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) most exceptional figures. The work she created for the WPA spoke to social issues such as economic inequality, which inspired 'Sing For Your Supper'. This work shrewdly satirized wealthy Americans while the workers

waited on the sidelines. Throughout the performance, the "Uncle Sam" character couldn't hold his tune. Sokolow said, "The unions were really my first audience. Poets or writers would read their work, singers and dancers would perform in their halls." Her dancing was a connection between the revolution for workers' equality and the expression of oneself, something that truly resonated with the working class audience it came before.

**Fireproofing and Construction Advancements at 55 Fifth Avenue:** On the east side of Fifth Avenue stands this impressive 18-story neo-Renaissance-style office building built in 1912 by Maynicke

& Franke. The otherwise reserved office tower features a detailed cornice, multiple ornamental stringcourses, and Ionic columns. According to the New York Times, the architecture firm was "a pioneer in the building of modern loft buildings," designing several other landmarked structures, including the Germania Bank Building at 190 Bowery, the International Toy Center at 200 Fifth Avenue, and the Sohmer Piano Building at 170 Fifth Avenue. As per prior submissions, this building was home to Columbia Records, where renowned artists such as



Hudson Hawley Rendering, 55 Fifth Ave 1912

Bessie Smith, Benny Goodman, Benny Carter, Ethel Waters, Garland Smith, and Billie Holiday recorded. It was also home to an impressive array of publishers over the years (like many buildings within the proposed historic district), perhaps most notably W.W. Norton & Co., the oldest and largest employee-owned published house, and publishers of works including Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (both published while Norton was located here), among many other prominent books.

The building was part of Henry Corn's large development plans in the area. Corn was also responsible for developing 78 Fifth Avenue and the recently landmarked 840 Broadway. Aside from its [previously referenced remarkable](#) cultural history, the building's construction is notable both for its building type and its advances in fire-proofing technology.

This building's construction is notable as it was the beachhead of the movement of commercial development south from Fourteenth Street and the district to the north. No. 55 Fifth Avenue ended up being as far south as commercial encroachment came on Fifth Avenue, as part of the ongoing struggle between those forces which sought to keep



No. 55 Fifth Avenue in 1923 (l.) and 2022, from the First Presbyterian Church garden

the Avenue as a residential and shopping district, and those which sought to transform it into one of the offices, lofts, and manufacturing. This structure would end up as the southernmost extent of that transformation, which was quite complete on the blocks to the north.

Until Henry Corn purchased the lot, this site was owned by Thomas. F. Ryan. Ryan was a wealthy landowner who acquired the property in hopes of preventing undesirable encroachment. Along with Manhattan Borough President George McAneny and the Fifth Avenue Planning commission, Ryan believed that the industrialization of Fifth Avenue would be to its detriment. But this building and 80 Fifth Avenue, two loft buildings on lower Fifth Avenue, represent industrialization with striking architectural style.



Fifth Avenue Plan, 1909

The building is also notable for advancements in fire safety technology, which were necessary for buildings such as these to grow ever larger. The construction of No. 55 Fifth



Avenue in 1912 was influenced by the nearby tragedy of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire only one year prior. The building was fire-proof and had multiple innovations ranging from a fireproof chute to fire-resistant loft diving walls in its first couple of years, all of which were notable advancements for the time. The building also featured an internal automatic sprinkler system one year before the city mandated this in loft buildings.

These buildings located within the Fifth Avenue corridor of the proposed historic district South of Union Square represent the innovations, progress, and turning points in history found throughout the district. This additional research connects these extant sites to great leaps forward in construction techniques, fire safety measures, women's equality, social justice, the arts, civil rights, philanthropy, treatment of immigrants, and much more. This tremendously important, relevant, and often overlooked history, along with the impressive and remarkably intact architecture, make these buildings and the entire district eminently worthy of landmark designation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew Berman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Berman  
Executive Director

Cc: Borough President Mark Levine  
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Historic Districts Council  
NY Landmarks Conservancy  
Municipal Arts Society