

Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building



DESIGNATION REPORT

Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building

LOCATION

Borough of Brooklyn
170 Second Avenue (aka 75 13th Street)

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

The Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building was built in 1908 as part of the growing industrial development surrounding the Gowanus Canal and remains one of the finest buildings in the neighborhood recalling this history.



170 Second Avenue, Brooklyn New York
1938-1940 Tax Photo, Municipal Archives

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Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building

170 Second Avenue, Brooklyn

Designation List 515 LP-2641

Built: 1908

Architect: Garabed George Heghinian, Civil Engineer

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map
Block 1025, Lot 49

Calendared: June 25, 2019

Public Hearing: September 24, 2019

On September 24, 2019, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. The Commission received support for the proposed designation from 13 people, including the representatives of New York City Councilmember Brad Lander, Gowanus Landmarking Coalition, Historic Districts Council, Society for the Architecture of the City, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Park Slope Civic Council, Friends and Residents of Greater Gowanus, The Municipal Art Society of New York, and four individuals. The Commission received 32 written submissions in support of designation.

Summary

Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building

The Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building is a handsome and highly intact former factory building located at the corner of Second Avenue and 13th Street in the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn. Designed by Garabed George Heghinian, in 1908, it was one of two factories built as investments for William Kelly, president of the Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company, whose factory and stables occupied the rest of the block bounded at the time by 12th and 13th Streets, and Second Avenue and the Gowanus Canal. The building's first tenant was the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company.

The Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company was incorporated in 1908 by Frank E. Cornell and his mother Margaret T. Cornell to manufacture and sell paints and varnishes. At the time of the building's construction, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted that "this borough is one of the foremost paint manufacturing centers in the United States; some of the oldest, largest, and most prominent paint varnish, white lead, and linseed oil plants being located here." Cornell retired from the business around 1921, but the company continued production at 170 2nd Avenue until the early 1930s. Between 1943 and 1951, Norge Sailmakers leased the building for the production of covers and sails for pleasure craft.

The Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building was designed in a simplified version of the American Round Arch style, and is notable for the handsome, austere ornamentation of its street

facades, articulated by corbeled brick piers and brick spandrels and brick rowlock-course segmental arches. The building's segmental-arched fenestration is grouped in pairs and trios. The central bay of the 13th Street facade contains wide segmental-arched loading doors on all three stories, topped by the extant armature for hoist equipment. The Second Avenue facade features a segmental arched loading bay at the first story, and recessed panels and an oculus within the gable. Except for the reconfigured window opening on Second Avenue, window and door replacements, and some infill at entrances, the building is remarkably intact and is a distinctive reminder of the Gowanus neighborhood's industrial history.

Building Description

Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building

Description

The three-story-and-basement building is located at the intersection of Second Avenue and 13th Street. It is clad in brick laid in a common bond brick pattern with segmental-arched windows, corbeled brickwork, and a gabled roof. The building's two street-facing facades are articulated by projecting brick spandrels and full-height piers with corbelling to accentuate depth. Framed within these elements are segmental-arched windows and doors. The Second Avenue facade has a gabled roofline with a roundel window in the center bay.

Second Avenue (East) Facade

The Second Avenue façade is three-bays wide with a gabled roofline. Piers and spandrel beams are articulated through corbelled brickwork, and frame three-equal sized recessed bays. The first-story central entry bay is aligned with the outer face of the spandrels and piers. It features a large segmental-arched opening with rowlock brick courses above. The flanking bays are recessed, each with two segmental-arched openings with rowlock brick courses. Historic photographs show entrances with metal steps and railings in the right-hand opening in both the southern and northern bays, one is extant in the northern bay; windows in the left-hand openings have stone sills. The second and third stories have three recessed bays each with two segmental-arched window openings, all with rowlock brick courses and rough-faced stone sills. The third-story bays follow the gable roofline and the corbelled detailing expresses a restrained triangular-shaped pediment.

The central bay of this story features a roundel window with a three rowlock brick course surround that is centered within the bay. The basement story has two segmental arched window openings with rowlock brick courses above and stone sills. These windows align with windows in the first story bay. A metal-capped brick bulkhead is visible on the northern edge of the roofline. A camelback terra cotta coping tile is visible along the entire length of the parapet.

Alterations

Historic two-over-two windows replaced with aluminum units on all stories; historic roundel four-pane window replaced; first story, southern bay historic door opening widened for window and partially infilled; metal guards and panel installed at loading dock opening in the central bay of the first story; non-historic door and solid panel infill in northern-most opening on the first story, vent installed in northern bay of first-story; metal security grilles installed at first-story and basement windows.

Thirteenth Street (South) Facade

The 13th Street façade is organized into five symmetrical bays framed in corbelled piers and spandrel beams. The center loading bay is aligned with the outer face of the corbelled framing elements, and is flanked by two recessed bays. The bays are symmetrical along the facade, with the central bay as the axis. The two bays directly flanking the central bay are of equal size, while the two outer bays are larger but equal to each other in size. Each story of the central bay features a large segmental-arched opening with rowlock brick courses above and metal sills; a steel I-beam hoist projects from the façade above the central third-story opening. The two eastern recessed bays on all three stories have three segmental-arched windows with rowlock brick courses above and rough-face stone sills. The bay

flanking the central bay to the west matches the details of the two flanking eastern bays. The westernmost bay features two segmental-arched openings with rowlock brick courses and rough-faced stone sills on all stories; the first story contains a door opening with a metal landing, stairs and railing, similar to the Second Avenue historic entrance. The basement story has seven segmental-arched window openings with rowlock brick courses and stone sills. These window openings align with the window openings above. A brick bulkhead is visible along the roofline at the westernmost bay. A camelback terra cotta coping tile is visible along the entire length of the parapet.

Alterations

Historic two-over-two windows replaced with aluminum units on all stories; metal security grilles installed on first-story and basement windows; metal panel installed below loading dock opening at first story; metal guards installed on opening of central-bay at the first-story; central bay loading doors replaced with windows on second and third stories; metal guard rails installed at central bay openings on second and third stories.

History and Significance

Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building

Early History of the Gowanus Area¹

The Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building is located within Brooklyn's Gowanus neighborhood, generally bounded by Baltic Street at the north, the Gowanus Expressway to the south, and from Bond Street eastward to Fourth Avenue. Before the arrival of European colonists, this area was occupied by the Canarsee, one of several Algonquin-speaking groups comprising the Lenape people, whose territory extended from the Upper Hudson Valley to Delaware Bay. The Canarsee lived in loosely organized, relatively autonomous groups in seasonal campsites and farming communities, moving with the seasons to obtain their food supply. They developed an extensive network of trails throughout Brooklyn, including one from the present Atlantic Terminal area to Gowanus Bay.

"Gowanus" is a Munsee word of uncertain meaning. The area's central geographic feature was Gowanus Creek, a tidal estuary originating near the present-day intersection of Third Avenue and Baltic Street and meandering southward through marshlands into Gowanus Bay. Estuaries like Gowanus Creek were vital to the Canarsee, providing access to the shoreline and its abundant shellfish. Native American sites have been identified in the area, including a campsite just east of the canal head where pottery, clay pipes, and arrowheads have been found; the Gowanus Houses just west of the canal occupy the former site of the village of Werpos.

In 1609, Englishman Henry Hudson, backed by the Dutch East India Company, explored the river

that now bears his name and opened the region to Dutch colonization. Although the Canarsee initially traded with Dutch and English settlers as they had with other Native groups, the colonists quickly overtook them and were displacing them by the 1640s. Never large in number, the Canarsee were devastated by armed conflict and the introduction of European diseases, as well as by land agreements based on European concepts of property ownership that were completely foreign to them². The few remaining Canarsee left the region entirely by the 1700s.

At the time of the American Revolution, Gowanus was largely agricultural, with much of its labor performed by enslaved people of African descent. Along the shore of Gowanus Bay, colonists had erected several tide mills, which released water impounded during high tide to grind grains into flour and meal. The area played a key role in the Battle of Long Island (also known as the Battle of Brooklyn), the first major conflict of the Revolutionary War and the largest waged in North America up to that time. In August of 1776, thousands of British troops mustered at Gravesend Bay with the goal of capturing New York City and crushing the nascent rebellion. One of the few routes leading to New York was the Gowanus Road, located around present-day Fifth Avenue. At the Vechte-Cortelyou House (demolished) on the Gowanus Road near 3rd Street, a small contingent of Maryland troops suffered severe casualties in battling the British forces and allowing Washington and his army to escape northward and survive.

Development of the Gowanus Canal³

The 1825 opening of the Erie Canal vaulted New York to preeminence among the nation's commercial ports and set off economic booms in both New York City and Brooklyn. Formerly a small settlement centered around the Fulton Ferry landing, Brooklyn

grew from 7,000 residents in 1820 to nearly 100,000 by 1850. Much of its waterfront between Greenpoint and Red Hook was built up with docks and warehouses, and row houses spread southward and eastward from Brooklyn Heights into new neighborhoods like Boerum Hill. Brooklyn was chartered as a city in 1834, and in 1839 the city extended the street grid to its outermost areas, providing a blueprint for its future growth. By this time, land speculation and the filling of marshlands were already occurring west of Gowanus Creek, in Red Hook, which would be transformed into a major grain-handling center with the opening of Atlantic Basin on Buttermilk Channel in 1846.

Although the Gowanus area remained rural into the 1840s, Red Hook's development, as well as the recent opening of Green-Wood Cemetery and completion of the first bridge across Gowanus Creek, focused attention on the creek and its 1,700 acres of surrounding wetlands. To real estate speculators and developers, the marshlands were worse than useless: unable to be built upon, they were also thought to generate unhealthy air that impeded development throughout the surrounding area. Draining the Gowanus marshes, the Brooklyn Eagle argued, would remove the "miasma which hangs about Prospect Hill and other portions of the city, making them liable to intermittent fevers and other diseases; and thus shutting them out from improvement."⁴ In 1847, at the request of Brooklyn's Common Council, the prominent hydraulic engineer David B. Douglass formulated plans for a permanent drainage canal emptying into Gowanus Bay. This self-cleaning canal would either extend through Brooklyn to Wallabout Bay, or connect to a parallel canal with locks and gates that would permit its periodic flushing.

Douglass' proposal was rejected in favor of a much cheaper one from the developer of Atlantic Basin, Daniel Richards. Approved as the Gowanus

Canal in 1849, Richards' waterway roughly followed the path of Gowanus Creek, extending northward from Gowanus Bay to around 6th Street, where it turned eastward before again turning northward around Second Avenue. Unlike Douglass, Richards saw no need for a flushing mechanism, expecting tidal action to keep the canal clean. His waterway would be an industrial as well as drainage canal, navigable by barges and other small vessels and containing several large commercial basins. "The introduction of this class of shipping into this section of our city would cause to spring to life much new enterprise, and introduce a lively business along the line of the canal," predicted Richards, who envisioned the canal's banks lined with "cheap warehouses, sheds and yards, for deposit and storage of heavy coarse goods, as also lumber, coal, brick, stone and wood yards, as well as manufactories."⁵

Despite the adoption of Richards' plan, no formal mechanism was created for its implementation, and the canal's construction, left up to local landowners, proceeded haphazardly through the 1850s. Central to the canal's completion would be the railroad magnate, financier, and speculator Edwin C. Litchfield, who had acquired the old Dutch farms between 1st and 9th streets, stretching from the canal eastward to what is now Prospect Park, in the early 1850s. Litchfield directed much of the filling, grading, and paving work along the east side of the canal; politically savvy and powerful, he was instrumental in creating a state commission to improve 3rd Street through the heart of his property between the canal and his new villa, Grace Hill.⁶ Although work on the canal stagnated during the Civil War, it accelerated starting in 1866 with the founding of Litchfield's Brooklyn Improvement Company to develop private docking facilities there. Soon afterward, the state chartered the Gowanus Canal Improvement Commission, which would dredge the canal, install permanent canal walls, and

carry the project through to completion over the next four years. During this time, Litchfield's company began building private basins along the east side of the canal, including those remaining today at 4th, 6th, and 7th Streets.

Industry along the Gowanus Canal⁷

As the canal neared completion in the late 1860s, area streets continued to be paved and opened and Daniel Richards' long-delayed vision of an urban waterway lined with industrial businesses began to be realized. By 1869, about a dozen firms had established themselves along the canal; most dealt in bulk goods, as would be typical of the Gowanus throughout its history. Several lumber yards, a stone yard, a sawmill, and factories making doors, blinds, and drainpipe were already operating on the Gowanus, which would play a key role in Brooklyn's late-19th- and early-20th-century building boom as a major entry and distribution point for building supplies. In 1872, the New York and Long Island Coignet Stone Company, a pioneering manufacturer and marketer of concrete block in the United States, moved to a five-acre site adjoining the canal's 4th Street Basin and began building its office (a designated New York City Landmark), one of the country's first concrete buildings.⁸ By the early 1870s, the canal had become the center of Brooklyn's coal trade. Most dealers of building supplies and other bulk goods operated out of wood-framed structures, few if any of which survive.

By 1880, more than 30 industrial firms had settled along the canal as Gowanus developed into one of Brooklyn's busiest industrial neighborhoods. By 1900, Brooklyn had 10,713 factories, employing 100,881 people. The leading employers in that year were foundries; men's clothing; boots and shoes; bread; tin; woven cloth; sugar; carpentry; paint; plumber and gas fittings; lumber; lithography; iron; and confectionary.⁹ A 1915 article in the magazine

Brooklyn Life compared statistics from a 1904 and a 1909 industrial census, finding that the number of manufacturing businesses in Brooklyn had grown by fifteen per cent in five years, a figure the article's author stated "was most encouraging."¹⁰ Area factories and other industrial businesses employed large numbers of Irish, German, and Scandinavian immigrants, with Italian immigrants joining them around the turn of the 20th century. Many factory workers were teenage boys and girls who labored under harsh conditions for low pay.

The growth of new factories in the area served New York City's rapid residential development and the need for building materials, architectural finishes, and household goods. Many factories in the area, including the former Montauk Paint Company Building, housed these industries. As Mike Wallace described in *Greater Gotham: A History of New York City From 1898 to 1919*,

"The spectacular spread of tenement and town houses generated demand for household goods, duly supplied by metropolitan manufacturers of crockery, pottery, enamelware, metal kitchenware, gas fittings, bulbs, iceboxes, artificial ice, chairs, furniture, cabinets, carpets, rugs, linoleum, paint and varnish, brushes, wallpaper, window frames, window shades, blinds, clocks, pianos, phonographs..."¹¹

As manufacturing grew in the early 20th century to meet increased need for these and other household products, many small manufacturers expanded and companies began to consolidate, and the buildings that housed these manufactures got larger. The era's distinctive feature would be the expanding number of large factories whose owners had incorporated and

tapped into the capital markets. Larger factory buildings began to crowd manufacturing areas.¹²

Despite Daniel Richards' expectation that the tides would keep the canal clean, pollution bedeviled the Gowanus practically from its start. Sewers were routed into Gowanus Creek starting in the late 1850s, and by 1877 the Eagle found the canal to be "very vile ... a nuisance that is seriously affecting the health of South Brooklyn people."¹³ By 1886, the canal was so choked with filth that some boats were having trouble reaching the docks. Three years later, a commission investigating the matter proposed filling in the canal, stating that,

"while the canal is a source of great profit to less than 100 persons, firms, or corporations ... it is detrimental to health, obstructive to traffic, and an injury ... to real estate values throughout South Brooklyn."¹⁴

Opened in 1911, the Gowanus Flushing Tunnel was expected to purify the canal by drawing its water through a mile-long tunnel into Buttermilk Channel, but it was only modestly successful.

In 1921, the *New York Times* called the Gowanus "one of the dirtiest, one of the shortest, and one of the most important waterways in the world," noting that it handled more freight annually than the entire Erie Canal, known then as the State Barge Canal.¹⁵ The 1920s would be the canal's most productive decade, when more than 20,000 vessels used it per year. Its use steeply declined in the 1930s with the onset of the Depression, the decline in local building activity, the shift from coal to oil, and the replacement of local waterborne freight with trucking. Its larger manufacturers were replaced by smaller, more specialized companies, many devoted to food production.

Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company

Prior to the Montauk Paint Company Building's construction, the block was larger than it is today, extending from Second Avenue to the Gowanus Canal between 12th and 13th Streets, and contained some wood frame structures that were constructed in the 1870s and 1880s.¹ In 1898 the Hobby and Doody Lumber and Building Material Company lumber yard operated on the west portion of the block, along the canal. At the turn of the 20th century, the block rapidly shifted from a mix of residential and industrial to entirely industrial. By 1903 the Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company owned most of the block, including the canal front property as well as a large L-shaped lot that included the corner of Second Avenue and 13th Street.¹⁶ The remaining portion of the block between the corner and canal front belonged to the Brooklyn Union Gas Company.

Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company was incorporated in 1895.¹⁷ Around 1900, William Kelly became president of the company.¹⁸ Kelly had worked in the construction field since 1872.¹⁹ Not long after joining the Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company, he expanded the company's holdings through the purchase of several properties in the Gowanus area, including the L-shaped lot on block 1025.²⁰ The company offices were located one block away at 407 Hamilton Ave.²¹

The Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company had contracts for work with the City of New York and soon became a well-established paving company in Brooklyn. The company was awarded numerous contracts for paving projects, including paving Broadway from Dyckman Street to Spuyten Duyvil in Manhattan, and Halsey Street from Lewis Avenue to Stuyvesant Avenue in Brooklyn.²²

In 1907, William Kelly filed for a building permit for a "three-story brick factory" to be constructed on the corner lot of Tax Block 1025 along 13th Street and Second Avenue.²³ The building

was proposed to be fifty feet wide by one hundred feet long and built with a concrete roof, concrete floors and brick partitions. At the time of construction the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company, was already listed as the lessee.²⁴

Early 20th Century Industrial Building Design in New York City

The design and construction of the Montauk Paint Company Building reflects the character of industrial building in America at the turn of the 20th century. As the Civil War ended new industrial building types were emerging from the traditional store, storehouses, and loft buildings. These new building types included warehouses and factories, many of which were constructed along the waterfronts of New York City, including Brooklyn.²⁵ Some of the earliest masonry warehouses started to appear on the Manhattan waterfront as early as the 1860s and the building type quickly spread to other boroughs, particularly Brooklyn.²⁶ Industrial areas in Brooklyn grew up along the East River and the Gowanus Bay and Canal, where proximity to waterborne transportation enabled efficient delivery of raw materials and shipment of manufactured goods.

Factory and warehouse buildings were utilitarian, with large windows bringing light and ventilation inside, and widely spaced columns creating relatively open and flexible floors. Early factory buildings utilized slow-burning construction, introduced in the 19th century and first used in New England Mills. This type of construction, with massive wooden posts or iron columns, and beams that burn slowly in a fire, was popular with fire insurance firms, and continued into the 20th century even after other technologies for factory construction had been invented. By the late nineteenth century new materials, notably steel and terra cotta were beginning to appear in factory construction. The steel skeleton frame had been in use in commercial

buildings since the construction of the Tower Building on Broadway in Manhattan in 1888 (now demolished), and reinforced concrete construction began to appear in the early years of the 20th century, leading to the construction of larger and taller buildings.²⁷

Warehouse and factory building designs were derived largely from their function. Noting their proliferation at the turn of the 20th century, Russell Sturgis, an architectural critic of the era, wrote in an 1904 *Architectural Record* article titled “The Warehouse and the Factory in Architecture,” that 175 Duane Street, (1879-1880), within the Tribeca West Historic District, and 393-399 Lafayette Street, The De Vinne Press Building (1885-1886), a designated New York City Landmark, were two of the best examples of the early warehouse and factory designs.²⁸ These structures clearly expressed their functionality through simple yet sophisticated details. These elements included reinforced loading platforms and structural columns grouped together to create larger openings.²⁹ Other design elements included the use of less expensive materials over traditional stone or cast iron, and the lack of a projecting cornice.³⁰ Sturgis also commented on the architectural expression of warehouse and factory designs, noting it reflected a utilitarian aesthetic based on a rational design and an emphasis on structural quality.³¹ Since many of the buildings had large vibrating machinery, or exterior hoists that could potentially damage projecting cornices, the austere, non-applied ornament was a practical and aesthetic choice.³²

According to Sturgis, many of the early factories and warehouses were designed by engineers, rather than architects.³³ The engineers did not consider the applied ornament of popular architectural styles of the time important to their building design but they often expressed the structural elements as part of their design. These elements did not define the aesthetic of the buildings

but did allow critics and architects the ability to connect to the buildings.³⁴ Engineers let the aesthetic of the building develop out of its functionality. This process became a basis for industrial architecture in America.³⁵ Author of *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States*, Betsy Hunter Bradley notes, “There was an accepted correct ‘feel’ or tone for industrial architecture that expressed strength, stability and function and eschewed the use of lavish or extensive decoration.”³⁶ Company stockholders, presidents and employees found comfort in the relatability and strength in the expression of the design in the new building type. The relatability expressed the value of the company and its establishment.³⁷

Engineers were more likely to have familiarity with the machinery and inner workings of a factory or warehouse. Many of the companies building factories and warehouses in the late 19th-to-early-20th century employed engineers. By giving the engineers design control of the factories, employers were able to reduce costs, and ensure the buildings met the functional needs of the company and its employees. Buildings were engineered to be spacious, substantial and support the machinery with in them, as well as protect the workers through fireproofing techniques and the use of materials that secured safety and cost effectiveness.³⁸

Design of the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building.

Designed by Garabed George Heghinian, a civil engineer who worked for the Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company, the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building is a thoughtful and refined example of early-20th century industrial architecture. The original 1909 building permit indicates a three-story steel frame structure of steel girders, beams, and columns, exterior walls of brick masonry ranging from 12 to 24 inches thick, and concrete floors and roof.

The building was designed in a simplified version of the American round-arch style, a style often associated with industrial buildings of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, and generally characterized by simple brick facades, often with round-or segmental-arch openings, piers or pilasters, scalloped cornices, horizontal banding, corbelled brickwork, molded surrounds, and projecting window hoods or lintels.³⁹

Heghinian used the facade’s structural elements to create details that pay tribute to the typical applied ornament used on older industrial buildings designed by architects. The corbelled brick and expression of structural elements “provide(s) a means of modeling the wall while accenting the structure and providing patterned relief.”⁴⁰ Heghinian’s handsome industrial design utilized intricate yet austere brickwork to create a composition that incorporated corbelled details, well-executed scale and proportion. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted the building as one the “finest and most substantial fireproof factories in Brooklyn.”⁴¹

Heghinian immigrated to Boston, Massachusetts from Turkey in 1894.⁴² Not long after, he enrolled at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, graduating in 1900 and becoming a naturalized citizen.⁴³ He moved to New York and began working for the Department of Highways of New York City in 1904, as an inspector and engineer.⁴⁴ In 1906, Heghinian started working for the Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company as an asphalt expert and consulting engineer. Heghinian also established himself as an inventor, securing multiple patents that varied from the coin operations on vending machines to a leveling rod that was used in asphalt paving.⁴⁵ It is unclear if Heghinian designed any other buildings for Kelly. By the 1930s Heghinian and his family had moved to Baltimore, Maryland.⁴⁶

Montauk Paint Company

In the years prior to the establishment of the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company, the Gowanus neighborhood represented an important part of Brooklyn's reputation as an industrial center. In 1910 there were approximately fifty paint manufactures in Brooklyn, together employing more than 2,000 people.⁴⁷ By the 1920s the New York City metropolitan area was the country's largest single center for the manufacture of chemicals, and Brooklyn was the front runner in paint and varnish manufacturing.⁴⁸

The first and longest tenant of 170 Second Avenue was the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company. The Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company was incorporated in 1908 with Frank E. Cornell, Margaret Cornell, and William J. Bryant listed as the directors.⁴⁹ The company operated on the third story of 170 Second Avenue.

The first general manager, secretary, and treasurer of the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company was Frank E. Cornell. Cornell, a Brooklyn native, began working for his father in the hardware business in 1888. In 1893, Cornell began to work for Benjamin Moore and Co. and later for Gerstendorfer Brothers, both paint companies.⁵⁰ Cornell invented and patented new processes for decorative metal leaf paints as well as a new shipping carton for the distribution of paint products.⁵¹ Cornell was active in the paint and varnish industry throughout his entire career. He was the secretary of the Paint, Oil and Varnish Club of New York, an active industry organization during the early 20th century.

The Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company specialized in select paint types, including concrete floor paint, a white enamel and a varnish stain. In an advertisement in the *Sweet's Catalogue of Building Construction*, "Montauk Special Concrete Floor Paint" promoted to help buildings maintain cleanliness, as well as provide more

sanitary work conditions since the paint was less dusty than a traditional concrete floor and easier to clean. The advertisement also notes that the product was used inside the Thomson Meter Company building, at 110-110 Bridge Street, a designated New York City landmark.⁵²

With its advantages in shipping techniques that were developed through Cornell's patents, the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company had the ability to ship its products not just throughout New York, but the entire United States and internationally as well.⁵³ The company operated out of 170 Second Avenue for more than 20 years.

Later History of 170 Second Avenue

Several other companies in similar industries operated out of 170 Second Avenue in the 20th century. One of the early tenants included the Diamond Decorative Leaf Company.⁵⁴

The Diamond Decorative Leaf Company was incorporated in 1910 with the directors Robert E. Hastings, Julius Fichtmueller and James Kilsheimer.⁵⁵ Mr. Fichtmueller, a German immigrant and Staten Island resident developed several United States and Canadian patents for the process of decorative gold leaf.⁵⁶

In 1942 the Norge Sailmakers Corporation leased the factory from William Kelly's estate.⁵⁷ The Norge Sailmakers manufactured yacht and sailboat sails as well as covers for pleasure crafts. In 1948 the property was sold to The Norge Realty Company and then in 1950 to Camp Affiliates, Ltd.⁵⁸ 170 Second Avenue remained a manufacturing factory through the 1960s. Today the building is privately owned by the Neo-Bauhaus Design Factory and serves as an artist studio.⁵⁹

Recent History of Gowanus Area and Canal

Much of the shipping industry had moved from the Gowanus area by the 1940s and the opening of the

Verrazano-Narrows Bridge in 1964 allowed goods to travel in and out of Brooklyn via automobile, reducing the need of the canal waterfront and water borne shipping.

Industry around the canal and throughout the Gowanus area rapidly declined in the 1970s and 1980s. Community groups began to advocate for cleaning up the canal and surrounding area, in an effort to to improve their quality of life. In 1973 a committee was established by Mayor John Lindsay and City Councilman Thomas J. Cuite to help the City of New York lobby for Federal funding to clean the canal.⁶⁰ The committee would be known as the Gowanus Canal Redevelopment Committee and was headed by Donald Elliott, the former City Planning Commission Chairman.⁶¹

The late 1970s and early 1980s brought continued community engagement in cleaning the canal. Much of the community complained about the smell of the canal and many saw property values decrease due to the conditions of the canal.⁶² A *New York Times* article stated “the smell is less a scent than an assault that reaches in to choke the throat.”⁶³ Around this time the Gowanus Canal Community Development Corporation (G.C.C.D.C.) formed. The G.C.C.D.C. along with other organizations actively sought to revitalize the area and the canal itself.

In the late 1980s work began on a pumping station and a water treatment plant in Red Hook, built to “take the bulk of raw sewage, that is being dumped daily into the canal and take it through an existing tunnel to a new treatment plant.”⁶⁴ In 1993 construction began on the expansion and rehabilitation of the Gowanus Canal Flushing Tunnel Pumping Station located at the top of the canal along Butler Street. This pumping station and tunnel would pump clean water from Buttermilk Channel and push it into the canal.⁶⁵

Over the past thirty years interest in both working and living in the Gowanus Canal area has

returned, and it has become a hub for creative industries and artists. The neighborhood now includes a wide variety of artists and artisans, cultural and educational institutions and non-profit organizations, many of whom have reactivated former industrial and manufacturing buildings, including the former Montauk Paint Company Building.

In 2010, the canal was declared a Superfund site, initiating a multiyear cleanup project that continues today. Reduction in sewage overflows and reactivation of the flushing tunnel in 2014 have improved conditions in and along the canal. Apartment houses have been constructed on many former canalside industrial sites in recent years, and the area is undergoing a rezoning by the New York City Department of City Planning.

Through the changing industry and development in the area, the Montauk Paint Company building has remained a prominent feature in the neighborhood and evokes its industrial heritage.

Conclusion

The Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building is a distinguished representation of early 20th-century American industrial architecture. The building’s austere, refined brickwork expresses its structure and function, and its facades are remarkably intact. It is an elegant reminder of the industrial development that shaped the Gowanus neighborhood in the early-20th century.

Endnotes

¹ Portions of this section are adapted from LPC, *Sunset Park South Historic District Designation Report (LP-2622)* (New York: City of New York, 2019), 9-10. Other sources include Richard W. Hunter, *National Register of Historic Places Eligibility Evaluation and Cultural Resources Assessment for the Gowanus Canal* (Northern Ecological Associates, Inc., 2004), 2-1 to 2-57; and Joseph Alexiou, *Gowanus: Brooklyn's Curious Canal* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

² Although European settlers considered their "purchases" of property from Native Americans to be outright acquisitions, the European concept of holding title to land was foreign to the Lenape, who considered these transactions as customary exchanges of gifts smoothing the way for settlers' temporary use of the land for camping, hunting, fishing, and the cultivation of crops.

³ Sources for this section include Hunter and Alexiou.

⁴ Cited in Alexiou, 114.

⁵ Cited in Alexiou, 114.

⁶ Litchfield's villa, designed by Alexander J. Davis and built between 1853 and 1857, is now within Prospect Park. It predated the park's construction and was designated as a New York City Landmark in 1966.

⁷ Sources for this section include Hunter and Alexiou; and M. Dripps, *Map of the City of Brooklyn* (New York: M. Dripps, 1869).

⁸ Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *New York and Long Island Coignet Stone Company Building Designation Report (LP-2202)* (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Matthew A. Postal.

⁹ LPC, *DUMBO Historic District Designation Report (LP2279)*, (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart, 10.

¹⁰ Ibid; "Brooklyn's Manufacturing Industries," *Brooklyn Life* 51 (29 May 1915): 140.

¹¹ Wallace, Mike, *Greater Gotham: A History of New York City from 1898 to 1919*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) 307

¹² Ibid., 307

¹³ "Very Vile: The Disgusting Condition of Gowanus Canal," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 3, 1877, 4.

¹⁴ Cited in Alexiou, 250.

¹⁵ "Gowanus Tonnage \$100,000,000 a Year," *New York Times*, October 29, 1922, 111

¹⁶ New York City Department of Finance, Brooklyn Conveyance Index

¹⁷ "New Corporations in which Brooklynites are Interested," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 16, 1895, 4

¹⁸ In 1941 The United States indicted 15 men and 15 firms from WPA frauds that included collusion in 60% markups for paving projects, Mr. Kelly and Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company were named as defendants. "U.S. Indictis 15 Men, 15 Firms in Boro, Queens WPA Fraud," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 6, 1941 p1

¹⁹ New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division, Case and Exceptions Transcriptions, Kelly Asphalt Block Company against Brooklyn Alcatraz Asphalt Company, Dec. 19, 1917

²⁰ Mr. Kelly lived in the Park Slope Historic District at 236 Berkley Place in a brownstone designed by Charles Werner and built by William Gubbins in 1887: LPC, *Park Slope Historic District Designation Report (LP-0709)*(New York: City of New York, 1973, 46

²¹ New York City, Department of Buildings, Brooklyn, New Building Permits Block 1025, Lot 49 and Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. "Atlas of the Brooklyn borough of the City of New York: originally Kings Co.; complete in three volumes ... based upon official maps and plans ..." New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 08, 2019. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-163d-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

²² "Corporation Notices," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 9, 1897 p. 11

²³ New York City, Department of Buildings, Brooklyn, New Building Permits Block 1025, Lot 49; NB 1395-1908

²⁴ New York City, Department of Buildings, Brooklyn, New Building Permits Block 1025, Lot 49

²⁵ Stern, Robert A.M., Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1880*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1999), 468

²⁶ LPC, *Tribeca West Historic District Designation Report*

(LP-1713)(New York; City of New York, 1991), 21

²⁷ This paragraph adapted from LPC, *DUMBO Historic District Designation Report* (LP2279), (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart, 14-15; slow burning construction is also discussed in Bradley, Betsy Hunter, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 127-131.

²⁸ LPC, *Tribeca West Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1713)(New York; City of New York, 1991), 21 and LPC, *De Vinne Press Building Designation Report* (LP-0201)(New York: City of New York, 1966), 2; ²⁸ Sturgis, Russell, “The Warehouse and the Factory in Architecture,” *Architectural Record*, vol.15, no. 1 (January 1904): 2, accessed August 6, 2019, <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/13598-architectural-record-archives#1900>

²⁹ Sturgis, Russell, “The Warehouse and the Factory in Architecture,” *Architectural Record*, vol.15, no. 1 (January 1904): 2, accessed August 6, 2019, <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/13598-architectural-record-archives#1900>

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2

³¹ LPC, *Tribeca West Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1713)(New York; City of New York, 1991), 23

³² Bradley, Betsy Hunter, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: oxford University Press, 1999), 231

³³ *Ibid.*,201

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 201

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 202

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 202

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 203

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 131

³⁹ Adapted from LPC, *DUMBO Historic District Designation Report* (LP2279), (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart, 14; the American Round Arch style is also discussed in Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 235-237.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 237

⁴¹ “Active Industrial Region,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 22, 1911, 10

⁴² National Archives at Boston; Waltham, Massachusetts; ARC Title: *Petitions and Records of Naturalization* , 8/1845 - 12/1911; NAI Number: 3000057; Record Group Title: Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685-2009; Record Group Number: RG 21

⁴³ Year: 1920; Census Place: *Brooklyn Assembly District 12*, Kings, New York; Roll: T625_1163; Page: 21B; Enumeration District: 718

⁴⁴ Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *First Decennial Record of the Class of 1900* (Rochester, New Hampshire, 1910), 51 accessed August 13, 2019, <https://archive.org/details/firstdecennialre00mass/page/50>

⁴⁵ The Engineering News Publishing Company, *Engineering News: Journal of Civil Mechanical, Mining and Electrical Engineering*, vol. 49 (July-Dec. 1903), 233, accessed August 13, 2019 https://books.google.com/books?id=HOg1AQAAMAAJ&q=garabed+heghinian&dq=garabed+heghinian&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjh_--Q-pHkAhUvmeAKHR8_AvEQ6AEwBXoECAUQA

⁴⁶ United States Federal Census, 1930, accessed Aug 1, 2019 Ancestry.com. 1930 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2002.Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930. T626, 2,667 rolls.

⁴⁷ “Biggest White Lead Plant in the World Figures in Local Paint Production,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 20, 1911, 38

⁴⁸ Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Route 9A Reconstruction Project, Contextual Study Manufacturing Historic Context Report* (New Jersey: Louis Berger & Assoc. for The City of New York, 1993), 32

⁴⁹ “Brooklyn Corporations,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* Feb 2, 1908, 5

⁵⁰ “Rotary Directory, Frank E. Cornell,” *Brooklyn Life Magazine*, June 1, 1915, 109

⁵¹ “Rotary Directory, Frank E. Cornell,” *Brooklyn Life Magazine*, June 1, 1915, 109 and United States Patent Office, *Official Gazette* (Vol 244 1917), 550

⁵² “Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company: Paints Enamels and Stains,” *Sweets Catalogue of Building Construction for the Year of 1912*, ed. *Architectural Record* (New York: Charles O’Brien Catalogue Printers, 1912), 1634

⁵³ “Rotary Directory, Frank E. Cornell,” *Brooklyn Life Magazine*, June 1, 1915, 109

⁵⁴ *Paint, Oil and Drug Review*, Vol 51(D. Van Ness Publishing), 1911, 12 and “Active Industrial Region: In Vicinity of Gowanus Canal, Ninth Street and Hamilton Avenue,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 22, 1911, 10

⁵⁵ “Brooklyn Corporations,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 30, 1910, p.10

⁵⁶ Canadian Patent Office, *Record and Register of Copyrights and Trademarks*, vol. 36 no.11 (November 1908), 697 accessed August 29, 2019 <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89081518680&view=1up&seq=823> and New York State Archives; Albany, New York; State Population Census Schedules, 1925; Election District: 35; Assembly District: 01; City: New York; County: Richmond; Page: 5 accessed August 28, 2019 Ancestry.com. New York, State Census, 1925 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

⁵⁷ “16-Family Apartment Bought In Brooklyn: Sailmakers Lease Factory Once occupied by Paint Firm,” *The New York Times*, August 8, 1942, 23

⁵⁸ New York City, Department of Finance, *Conveyance Index Records*

⁵⁹ New York City, Department of Finance, ACRIS records accessed August 22, 2019

⁶⁰ Gupte, Pranay, “Coalition Will Seek-\$300 Million For Sewer,” *The New York Times*, February 11, 1973, 115

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 115

⁶² Rangel, Jesus, “After Decades Gamy Gowanus Gets a Cleanup,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 1986, B1

⁶³ Lewine, Edward, “The Gowanus Canal: An Appreciation,” *The New York Times*, August 20, 1998, CY1

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Lambert, Bruce, “Transforming the Murky Gowanus Canal,” *The New York Times*, December 19, 1993, CY10



**Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company
Building (13th Street Facade)**
Sarah Moses, October 2019



**Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company
Building (13th Street Facade)**
Sarah Moses, October 2019



Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building
(Second Avenue Facade)
Sarah Moses, October 2019

Findings and Designation

Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1025, Lot 49 as its Landmark Site.

