

Offerman Building, 503-13 Fulton Street and 234-48 Duffield Street, Brooklyn.
Peter J. Lauritzen, architect, 1890-93.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 145, lot 35.

On November 16, 2004, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Offerman Building and the related landmark site (Item No. 1). The public hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eight witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the Brooklyn Heights Association, Fort Greene Association, Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development, Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, Society for the Architecture of the City, and Municipal Art Society. The owner and representatives of the Fulton Mall Improvement Association and the Downtown Brooklyn Council asked the Commission to delay its decision. In addition, the Commission has received letters in support of designation, from Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, City Councilmember Letitia James, and City Councilmember David Yassky.

Summary

An outstanding example of a commercial structure executed in the Romanesque Revival style, the Offerman Building was constructed in two phases, between 1890 and 1893. Located on an irregularly-shaped lot, adjoining Fulton and Duffield Streets, it was commissioned by Henry Offerman, who made his fortune in the sugar industry, to serve as the S. Wechsler and Brother store. The building was designed by Peter J. Lauritzen, a Danish immigrant who worked in Washington D. C. during the 1870s before moving to New York City in 1883. He specialized in private clubs, residences, and commercial structures. Many of Lauritzen's designs were inspired by medieval sources and the Fulton and Duffield Street elevations are typical of his work in the 1890s, incorporating multi-story arcades, textured limestone, decorative moldings, and reliefs that identify the date of construction, name of the building, and owner. Following the closing the Wechsler store in 1897, the building was leased to a succession of large retail tenants. Martin's Department Store was the best-known and most successful, occupying the structure for more than fifty years, from 1924 to 1979. Fondly remembered by many Brooklynites, the store specialized in men's and women's clothing, particularly bridal ware. Despite alterations to the lower floors on Fulton Street in 1946-47, the Offerman Building retains much of its original character and is one of the most impressive structures in downtown Brooklyn.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Development of Fulton Street as a Commercial District

For more than a century Fulton Street has been an important commercial district, attracting shops, restaurants, and theaters. Originally an Indian trail improved by European settlers, by 1809 it was known as the Brooklyn and Jamaica Turnpike, a busy toll road that extended into Queens and Long Island. From the East River, Fulton Street heads south, turning sharply east near Brooklyn City (now Borough) Hall (1845-48, a designated New York City Landmark), passing through Fort Greene and Bedford-Stuyvesant toward Jamaica. The blocks east of the civic center, between what it is now Adams Street and Flatbush Avenue, were generally called upper Fulton Street (or Avenue) during the nineteenth century. Brooklyn was granted its city charter in 1834 and during the years that followed a residential neighborhood formed in the area close to the proposed site of the city hall that was once part of the Duffield estate.¹ Evidence of this wave of development has been preserved in a group of structures that are now part of the MetroTech campus, including such designated New York City Landmarks as the First Free Congregational Church (1846-47, later known as the Bridge Street Church) and the four row houses now located at 184-188 Duffield Street (1835-47).

Prior to construction of the Brooklyn Bridge (1867-83, a designated New York City Landmark), Brooklyn's commercial center was found near the waterfront, between Fulton Ferry and Borough Hall. Construction of roads leading to the new bridge disrupted traffic patterns and many businesses soon relocated to upper Fulton Street. Most retailers chose sites on the south side of the street where the lots are rectangular and the afternoon light would not interfere with window displays.² Transit improvements accelerated this trend, connecting the district to not only outlying neighborhoods in Brooklyn, but, to Manhattan and Long Island, as well. The Long Island Railroad, which ran trains in a tunnel along Atlantic Avenue (four blocks south) until 1860, resumed service to Flatbush Avenue in 1877. During the next two decades many stores opened along this section of Fulton Street, in part due to construction of the elevated railroad which began service from Nostrand Avenue to Hoyt Street (and the Brooklyn Bridge) in April 1888.³ The popular restaurant Gage & Tollner relocated here in 1892, altering a brownstone structure at 372 Fulton Street (c. 1875, a designated New York City Landmark) with a new storefront and interior.⁴ IRT subway service to Hoyt Street – the station directly in front of the Offerman Building – commenced in 1908, followed by BMT service to Dekalb Avenue in 1915 and Lawrence Street in 1920, and IND service to Jay Street/Borough Hall in 1933. Downtown Brooklyn flourished during these years, attracting not only retail businesses, but also cultural institutions, including the Brooklyn Academy of Music (part of the Brooklyn Academy of Music Historic District), which moved from Brooklyn Heights to Lafayette Avenue in 1908, and Long Island University, established in 1926. Other notable structures include the Dime Savings Bank (1906-8, 1931-32) and the Williamsburgh Savings Bank (1927-29), both designated New York City Landmarks.

Department Stores

The department store was a nineteenth-century invention. Prior to the Civil War, most retail stores occupied modest structures, typically former brick or frame residences that were located close to the waterfront. A.T. Stewart, who began his career selling Irish lace and related goods, founded New York City's first department store in 1846. Situated near City Hall on Broadway in Manhattan, the four-story building (a designated New York City Landmark) resembled a Renaissance palace.⁵ Faced in marble, the elegant structure garnered considerable attention, attracting throngs of customers and frequent imitators. Though several large additions were built in the 1850s, it was not adequate to meet Stewart's needs and in 1862 he moved his business to a full-block site at Broadway, between East 9th and 10th Streets (demolished). Arnold Constable & Company (1868-76, part of Ladies' Mile Historic District) and Lord & Taylor (1869-70, a designated New York City Landmark) followed Stewart to the area, helping create Ladies' Mile, where major retailers clustered along the wide avenues as far north as 23rd Street. These increasingly large commercial palaces captured the public's imagination and dominated the streetscape. Designed in a succession of fashionable styles, from Italianate and neo-Grec to Beaux Arts, they were frequently distinguished by multi-story elevations, broad plate glass windows, steam-powered elevators, gas lighting, and domed rotundas.

In Brooklyn, the main shopping district was located on upper Fulton Street. The dry goods merchant A. D. Matthews & Sons, founded at 93 Main Street in 1836, was the pioneer. Due to construction of the Brooklyn Bridge he was forced to relocate in 1873, operating briefly at 398 Fulton Street, before settling into a

25-foot-wide Second Empire-style building (demolished) at the corner of Gallatin Place. Many firms opened stores in the vicinity, including Wechsler & Abraham, later known as Abraham & Straus. Established in 1865 by Joseph Wechsler, it grew to be one of the largest dry goods stores in the nation, with 1,500 employees. Located at 422-32 Fulton Street (begun 1885), between Gallatin Place and Hoyt Street, the five-story building had a 125-foot-wide front and was entered through an impressive three-story-tall arch. At the core of the building was a glazed court, that “furnished ample light to every floor.”⁶ Similar features were adopted in neighboring stores, most notably those occupied by Frederick Loeser and Company (begun 1887), at 484 Fulton Street, and S. Wechsler & Brother, the original tenant in the Offerman Building.

Henry Offerman (c. 1823-1896)

Henry Offerman, despite great success as a businessman, is a relatively obscure figure. Described by the *New York Times* as a “millionaire” in 1890, he lived in Williamsburg and was president of the Brooklyn Sugar Refining Company. Brooklyn was a leading center of sugar production and Offerman’s plant was found on the East River waterfront at South 2nd Street, adjacent to a much larger facility owned by Havemeyer & Elder. In an attempt to control prices, Henry O. Havemeyer established the Sugar Refineries Company (commonly called the Sugar Trust), including Offerman’s firm, in 1887. The company was determined illegal by the state supreme court in 1891 – the same year that the first stage of the Offerman Building was completed and the Wechsler store opened.⁷

An elder in the German Evangelical Lutheran Church at 63 Schermerhorn Street,⁸ Offerman supported many related causes, including the German Hospital Society of Brooklyn. He was associated with several German shooting clubs and helped organize the first national sharpshooters tournament in 1895. Following his death in 1896, heirs, including C. Henry Offerman, Mrs. William Lasch, John Offerman, Mrs. D. Schmidt and Theodore Offerman, financed the construction and furnishing of what would become known as the Dreier Offerman Home for unwed mothers and children. Located on Gravesend Bay, the building was demolished in 1933 and the property became part of Drier Offerman Park, now named Calvert Vaux Park.⁹

Peter J. Lauritzen¹⁰

The architect of the Offerman Building was Peter J. Lauritzen. Born in Jutland, Denmark, in 1847, he trained at the Polytechnic School of Copenhagen and moved to Washington, D.C. in the late 1860s where he worked with the Treasury Department’s supervising architect, Alfred B. Mullett. In 1875 Lauritzen was appointed architect for the city of Washington, D. C. and from 1875 to 1883 served as consul for the Danish government.¹¹ He moved to New York City in 1883 and for two years headed the Jackson Architectural Iron Works, one of the oldest and most successful producers of iron building components in the metropolitan region.¹²

Lauritzen formed his own architectural practice around 1885. His earliest commission was the Manhattan Athletic Club (1889-90, demolished). Though he was not invited to participate in the limited competition for the club’s design, his unsolicited proposal won and was built at the southeast corner of Madison Avenue and 45th Street.¹³ Six stories tall, the Romanesque Revival-style structure was distinguished by large arched entrances and mast-like corner towers. It was described by a contemporary writer as “bold and strong in form, subdued yet warm in color, rich and graceful in embellishment.”¹⁴ The unusual circumstance that led to Manhattan Athletic Club commission certainly enhanced Lauritzen’s reputation and during the late 1880s and 1890s he was extremely active in Brooklyn. Among his finest works was the Union League Club (1889-90, later the Unity Club) on Bedford Avenue in Crown Heights. Faced in brick, granite and brownstone, the corner tower had a hipped roof and octagonal loggia. The interiors were well-equipped, featuring dining and reception rooms, as well as a bowling alley and shooting gallery. He also remodeled the former Hawley mansion at 563 Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg for use as the Hanover Club in 1890, and designed the Crescent Athletic Club (1895, demolished) at 25-27 Clinton Street in Brooklyn Heights. These commissions led to residential projects, including houses for Nicholas(?) Toerge (1890) on St. Marks Avenue, Wilson G. Randolph (1891) at 239 Hancock Place, and Frederick Mollenhauer (1896), founder of the Mollenhauer sugar refinery, at 527 Bedford Avenue. Lauritzen also designed eight “engine and truck” houses (1894-97) for the Brooklyn Fire Department.¹⁵

Lauritzen lived close to Offerman in Williamsburg and was a member of the Union League and Hanover Club. He maintained offices in Manhattan at 120 Broadway and later at 23 East 23rd Street and in

Brooklyn with Louis H. Voss (d. 1936) at 350 Fulton Street.¹⁶ Little is known about Voss and it is not clear when they formed their partnership. When Lauritzen left the firm in 1897 to join the Yukon gold rush, his son, William, became Voss' partner. Though he later returned to Brooklyn and was described as a "prominent billiard player and clubman" in January 1901, little is known of his subsequent years.¹⁷

The Romanesque Revival Style

The Offerman Building is a particularly fine example of a commercial structure executed in the Romanesque Revival style. Inspired by German, Italian, and frequently French medieval sources, the style was introduced in New York City during the 1840s. Early surviving examples in New York City include: the Church of the Pilgrims (Richard Upjohn, 1844-46, part of the Brooklyn Heights Historic District), Saint George's Church (Blesch & Eidlitz, 1846-56, a designated New York City Landmark) on Stuyvesant Square in Manhattan, and the original sections of the Astor Library (Alexander Saeltzer, 1849-53, a designated New York City Landmark) on Lafayette Street. These round-arched designs anticipate the work of the American architect Henry Hobson Richardson. Active from the late 1860s to the mid-1880s, Richardson was one of the most influential designers of his age. Trained at Harvard College, the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and in the offices of the French architects Theodore Labrouste and Jacques Ignace Hittdorff in Paris, he returned to the United States in 1865 with a strong interest in the medieval architecture of southern France.¹⁸ In Richardson's finest works, the use of ornament is kept to a minimum, instead, he relied on rock-faced masonry, monumental arches, and multi-story arcades to create visual interest.

Richardson's influence was felt in a great range of American building types. While many examples were government buildings, churches and houses, his widely-praised R. & F. Cheney Building (1875-76) in Hartford, Connecticut, demonstrated that the Romanesque style could be used to great effect in commercial work. Frequently imitated by his contemporaries, this building featured ground-level arcades, several floors of offices, and a prominent corner tower. This layering of textured features would shape early skyscraper development in New York City, as seen in the New York Times Building (George B. Post, 1887-89, a designated New York City Landmark) at 41 Park Row, the Tower Building (Bradford Gilbert, 1888-89, demolished) at 50 Broadway, the Corbin Building (1888-89) at Broadway and John Street, and the McIntyre Building (R. H. Robertson, 1890-92, part of Ladies' Mile Historic District) at Broadway and 18th Street. The style was also popular in Brooklyn where significant examples include: the Charles Millard Pratt House (1890, part of the Clinton Hill Historic District), the New York Avenue Methodist Church (J. C. Cady & Co., 1891) on Dean Street in Crown Heights, the 23rd Regiment Armory (Fowler & Hough and Issac Perry, 1891-95, a designated New York City Landmark) at 1322 Bedford Avenue in Crown Heights, and the Brooklyn Fire Headquarters (Frank Freeman, 1892, a designated New York City Landmark) at 365-67 Jay Street, near Fulton Street.

Design and Construction of the Offerman Building

Offerman acquired the site in two stages. The first eight lots, facing Fulton Street and Duffield Street, were purchased in late 1889 and 1890 for \$235,000. According to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the property "was secured at a low figure, as the locality is one of the best for business purposes."¹⁹ Construction began in May 1890 and this date is displayed above the Fulton Street entrance in the pendentives ("18" and "90"). William and Thomas Lamb served as builders.²⁰ Ten additional lots were acquired during the first half of 1892, increasing the length of the Duffield Street wing to 180 feet. A band of stone relief, inscribed "1890 OFFERMAN BUILDING 1892" provides the starting dates for each phase of construction. Built to increase retail space and double the number of loading bays, the 87-by-100-foot annex was completed during Fall 1893.

Located on the north side of Fulton Street, the Offerman Building is set on an irregularly-shaped lot that is part of a trapezoidal block. It has multiple facades, ranging from 19 to 180 feet in length. The street elevations are both located at mid-block: the 100-foot-long Fulton Street façade is between Bridge and Duffield Streets, and the 180-foot-long Duffield Street façade is between Fulton and Willoughby Streets. The Fulton Street façade is more ornate and best viewed from the south, along Hoyt Street.

At the time of construction, the Offerman Building was among the tallest buildings in Brooklyn. Though the number of floors (eight) is not especially noteworthy, the ceilings are high, particularly near the base. To achieve this height, it is likely that both steel and cast iron was used. The Fulton Street elevation has a strong vertical emphasis, recalling the design of early skyscrapers. Basically a tripartite composition, Lauritzen

divided the masonry façade into multiple, sometimes overlapping, arcades. The arches vary in height and width, creating a sense of great visual complexity. Between the fourth and sixth floors the spandrels project slightly forward, giving the façade a subtle organic quality.

To distinguish the building from its neighbors, many of whom were large retailers, the elevations were clad with light-colored materials: limestone, buff-colored brick, and terra cotta. A writer in the *Brooklyn Eagle* commented that “the columns that support the great doorway and arches of the windows are ornamented as profusely as the stone mason’s art will permit.”²¹ Though the ground story is altered, the ornament described is, for the most part, intact. Particularly notable are the clustered colonnettes, floriated capitals, billet moldings, and lions that hold cartouches displaying Offerman’s initials. Near the top of the building, the ornament is especially dense, drawing one’s attention to the upper floors. Of particular interest are the moldings that divide the sixth and seventh stories. Rather than decorated with short cylinders or square sectioned blocks, there are two alternating rows of small grotesque human heads. Above the seventh story is a roof-top pavilion. The *Brooklyn Eagle* said the “tower” was “as big as some city houses, which is used only as an observatory, from which the view is only limited by the power of the eye.”²²

At the base of the building were originally five arches. To enter the store, customers passed through the center arch. Many department stores were designed in this fashion during the late nineteenth century. Said to be “higher and wider” than most, this architectural feature increased visibility and shielded customers from inclement weather. The *Brooklyn Eagle* reported that the entrance was:

. . . alcove in form and the recesses thus formed is framed with glass windows, some of the plates the largest that are made. This attractive presentation is heightened by the carved columns and trimming of quartered oak, and the fine pavement of mosaic work.²³

Above the first story – at the level of the elevated railway – a cornice divided the five arches in two sections. From a passing train or the station platform, passengers could catch glimpses of the sales floor on the second story and admire the richly detailed openings, consisting of low relief, superimposed arches, polished stone columns, and multi-pane windows.

The longest façade faces Duffield Street. Clad in mostly light-colored brick, it has eight arched openings that originally served as loading bays. Arranged in two groups of four, the central pairs are slightly taller than those that flank it. This façade was built in two stages and above the first story two distinct campaigns are discernable. To the south, the multi-story arcade is interrupted by a masonry sign with incised Art Nouveau-style lettering, whereas the north section rises without a break. At the sixth story, an arcade runs the full length of the façade, crowned by crenellated brickwork. A metal shield hangs near the center of the fifth story and above it a metal armature designed to hold a flagpole.

Retail Tenants

The Offerman Building was constructed for S. Wechsler & Brother, a department store specializing in dry goods. Samuel Wechsler was the brother of Joseph Wechsler, who partnered with Abraham Abraham to form Wechsler & Abraham in 1865. Three years later, in 1868, Samuel opened his own business, manufacturing cloaks. He formed a partnership with his brother Herman in the mid-1870s and opened a small shop at 293-295 Fulton Street, near what is now Cadman Plaza. When Wechsler & Abraham moved to upper Fulton Street in 1885, he leased the building they vacated, as well as the former Liebmann Brothers & Owings location on Washington Street. The expanded store was a great success, but the exodus to upper Fulton Street had begun and in 1890 the Wechslers signed an agreement to lease the projected Offerman Building.

The store opened to great fanfare on May 1, 1891. A varied selection of dry goods was available for purchase, from clothing and linens to upholstered furniture, rugs, and bric-a-bric. From Fulton Street:

One enters directly into the broad main aisle running the full length of the building and a score of steps brings the visitor near enough to the great well, or interior dome, to look up a dizzy height to the railings and attractive circular counters that surround it on floor after floor until the glass vaulting of the roof is reached.²⁴

The building had its own electrical generator, providing power for seven elevators, a pneumatic cash system, and incandescent lights.

A new business entity was formed in October 1892, consisting of the Wechslers and C(harles) Henry Offerman. Known as Wechsler Bros. & Co., the partnership lasted just two years. It was dissolved in September 1895, leaving the store under the:

. . . sole direction of Henry Offerman, father of the former junior partner. Mr. Offerman has acquired the entire stock, leases and good will of the old firm and will continue the business under his own name.²⁵

Following Henry Offerman's death in 1897, the store closed and the contents were sold to Joseph H. Bauland, of Morgenthau, Bauland & Co., proprietors of the Bee Hive store in Chicago. Leonard Moody, the broker who negotiated the million dollar transaction, reported:

Mr. Bauland came to New York on business, where I met him, and in a general business talk with him suggested that the best location for opening a large dry goods store in the greater New York was in Brooklyn. I brought him over and showed him the Offerman store, and after looking at several locations, he was satisfied that the Fulton street house was the best we had to offer.²⁶

Bauland's Chicago syndicate was extremely active in retail sales; his brother, Jacob Bauland, was manager of the recently-opened Siegel-Cooper Dry Goods Store (1897, part of the Ladies' Mile Historic District) and in April 1897 he acquired the Liebmann Company, one of the oldest dry goods firms in Brooklyn.²⁷

The new store, called Joseph H. Bauland's Great Cash Store, opened in March 1897. The interiors were gradually reconfigured; three additional elevators were built and departments devoted to grocery products and sewing goods were added. From 1903-07 the building was leased to Chapman & Company. Plans for the opening of the Darlington Company's new department store in late 1907, with interiors remodeled by "experts from Paris," failed to materialize and by 1909 the building was converted to offices with stores at the base.²⁸

The best known and most successful tenant was Martin's Department Store. Founded by the merchant Hyman Zeitz (c. 1860-1930) in the adjoining building at the corner of Bridge Street in 1904, the business slowly expanded, acquiring the Offerman Building in 1922.²⁹ Two years later, after a nearly complete remodeling of the interiors, Martin's opened in November 1924.³⁰ The store prospered, shaping the history and character of the Fulton Street corridor. Zeitz was an early advocate of the demolition of Fulton Street's elevated railroad which he called "unsightly and dangerous . . . a disgrace to the civic pride of Brooklyn."³¹

Martin's enjoyed great success in the late 1940s and 1950s. Morris Lapidus, who established his own firm in 1944, was associated with the store for more than a dozen years. Hired by Fred Zeitz, he claimed that the store was his first client. In 1979 the celebrated hotel designer reminisced: "It launched my career." While many projects involved interior work, particularly remodeling sales floors in what was described as a "futuristic" style, he was also responsible for designing a new base for the Fulton Street facade. Completed by March 1947, Lapidus simplified the storefronts and fenestration, using polished granite panels to focus attention on the entrance and display windows. This color chosen complements the squat columns that divide the second-story windows. Within the tall central arch, Lapidus installed a narrow belt of red granite that projects slightly forward as it nears the top. The *Brooklyn Eagle* enthusiastically reported that these modifications did away with the "gimcracks of the Victorian era."³²

Fondly remembered by many Brooklynites, during the 1960s the *New York Times* called the store an "oasis of calm." Martin's was:

[Fulton] street's most prestigious unit, not only does more bridal business than any other store in the United States, but it is today one of the largest family-owned specialty stores in the country . . . which many consider a Fifth Avenue outpost because of its emphasis on better price and high quality³³

Profits, however, steadily declined during the 1970s and the Martin's chain was sold to the Seedman Merchandizing Group. Described by the new owners as "no longer related to the surrounding shopping area," the store closed in early 1979. Despite announcements that the Offerman Building would be demolished in August 1979, it was not razed and is now occupied by offices and a street level clothing store.³⁴

Description

The Offerman Building is a well-preserved example of a late nineteenth-century department store. There have been relatively few changes to the elevations and the building occupies the original footprint. The **main façade**, facing Fulton Street, is 100 feet wide. It is divided into three vertical bays. The central section is eight stories tall and the bays that flank it are seven stories tall. The two-story base is altered, faced mostly with polished granite. In the side bays, pin-mounted letters are silhouetted against the granite. In the central bay, free-standing lettering is silhouetted against glass. The red granite arch and window grids were installed by Morris Lapidus in 1946-47. Some of the windows have been altered or are broken.

Above the base, at the third story, is a single-story arcade with four windows and squat granite columns. At the east and west ends are sculptures of lions that hold cartouches with Henry Offerman's initials. The wide center arch is surmounted by stone ornament that incorporates the initial date of construction (18 and 90) and three windows divided by colonnettes. Above the third story, pairs of arches rise to the sixth story. Each arch frames a pair of non-historic aluminum windows that flank a single column. Though the arched windows at the sixth story are not historic, they appear to flank historic (possibly metal) columns. Above the third story, a central arch rises to the seventh story. Flanked by two-story high pilasters, at each story are three non-historic aluminum windows separated by columns. At the seventh story, the gridded windows (painted maroon) in the center bay are original to the building. Above is a single-story pavilion with three one-over-one windows. Richly-detailed moldings, reliefs and faces, embellish the top of the arches at the sixth story, the seventh story, and the eighth story. A pair of lacy stone finials mark the top of the building. The walls that adjoin the Fulton Street façade are faced with brick and are visible from the street. The **west wall** faces Bridge Street and is punctuated by non-historic window openings. The **east wall** is now mostly disguised by a vinyl advertisement.

Along **Duffield Street**, the building is six stories tall and 180 feet long. Most of the windows appear to be non-historic. This elevation faces east and is divided into three sections. The ground story has eight arched loading bays, arranged in groups of four. Each arch springs from squat granite columns. Within each group, the center two bays are taller than the bays that they flank. Along the north and south ends, there is single deep set window with non-historic grilles in the upper half. The arch at the south end of the ground floor incorporates a door; it has a vinyl awning and non-historic glass and metal doors. Directly south of the entrance is roll-down metal gate. The eight arches in the middle section extend from the second to the fifth story. The arches spring from shallow pilasters. The center pilaster has two windows; the lower window is rectangular and has stone lintels and sills, the upper window is arched and has a stone sill. Farther up the center of the façade, between the arches on the sixth story, is a reddish metal cartouche with the letters "H" and "O" superimposed. To the south, the second-story windows and transoms support a carved frieze: "1890 OFFERMAN BUILDING 1892." The uppermost section of the façade incorporates a series of small arched windows. On the roof, a wood water tower is visible.

The **north wall** of the Duffield Street wing, facing Willoughby Street, is 100 feet long. It is visible above the adjoining buildings at 228 and 230 Duffield Street. The rear section, just beyond the bulkhead, is set back from the lot line and has windows on the upper floors. The **south wall** of the Duffield Street wing, facing the intersection of Fulton Street and Duffield Street, is faced with brick and has no windows. The west side of the Duffield Street wing is 130 feet long and faces Bridge Street.

Researched and written by
Matthew A. Postal
Research Department

NOTES

- ¹ “Old Mrs. Duffield strenuously resisted the opening of Duffield Street through her property; and the venerable mansion itself after being rudely jostled and crowded by modern building, was finally destroyed by fire on the 14th of April 1857.” Henry Stiles, *A History of the City of Brooklyn*, 1867, Vol. 2, 165.
- ² “Changes in Brooklyn,” *New York Tribune*, April 15, 1888, 11.
- ³ “Brooklyn’s New Road Opened,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1888, 8.
- ⁴ Gage & Tollner was originally located at 302 Fulton Street. The interior is a designated New York City Landmark.
- ⁵ The Stewart store was constructed in five stages between 1845 and 1884.
- ⁶ “A Complete Establishment,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1885.
- ⁷ “Sugar” *Encyclopedia of New York City* (Yale University Press, 1995), 1140.
- ⁸ Now the Long Island College Hospital Therapeutic Nursery, the Romanesque Revival style church was designed by J. C. Cady in 1888.
- ⁹ See “Historical Signs” at www.nycgovparks.org. Henry Offerman is buried at Brooklyn’s Greenwood Cemetery.
- ¹⁰ See *The Eagle and Brooklyn* (The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1893), 893; *A History of Real Estate, Building, and Architecture in New York City* (1898/1967) 689; Robert Stern, *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (Monacelli Press, 1999), 220-221, 859-861, 902-3.
- ¹¹ In Washington D. C. Lauritzen designed and developed the Annie A. Cole residences at 1400-1402 Massachusetts Avenue (demolished) in 1874.
- ¹² See *A History of Real Estate, Building, and Architecture in New York City*, (1898/1967), 485-86.
- ¹³ George Albert White, “History of the Manhattan Athletic Club,” *Outing*, July 1890.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 308.
- ¹⁵ The following firehouses were designed by Lauritzen: Engine Company 240 (1309 Prospect Avenue, 1895-96); No. 249 (491 Rogers Avenue, 1895-6); No. 235 (206 Monroe Street, 1894-95), and No. 237 (43 Morgan Avenue, 1894) and Ladder No. 18 (now No. 114, 5209 Fifth Avenue, 1897). See *New York City National Register Thematic Group*, nomination by Office of Metropolitan History, Vol. II; and “100 Years of Service to Bay Ridge Brooklyn: Ladder Company 114” at www.nyfd.com/history_ladder_114_1.html.
- ¹⁶ Little is known about Voss. William C. Lauritzen is listed as an independent architect in New York City directories from 1903-28. Voss is buried in Brooklyn’s Greenwood Cemetery. ” See “Gold vs. Architecture” *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 7, 1897; *New York Times*, August 7, 1897; *New York Times*, January 15, 1901.
- ¹⁷ See *New York Times*, August 7, 1897; January 15, 1901.
- ¹⁸ For a brief period, from 1869-74, he lived in a house of his own design in Arrochar on Staten Island. “H.H. Richardson House” (New York Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2004), report by Virginia Kurshan.
- ¹⁹ “Opening a Big Store,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 3, 1891, 2.
- ²⁰ See *Brooklyn Eagle*, clipping, June 8, 1924; Lauritzen also worked with the Lamb Brothers on the Hanover Club, completed in June 1890. See *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 8, 1890, 6.
- ²¹ “Wechsler Bros. & Co.’s New Store,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 27, 1893, 19.
- ²² “Opening a Big Store,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 3, 1891, 2.
- ²³ “S. Wechsler & Bro.: Their Spacious and Handsome Business Home on Fulton Street,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 27, 1892, 2-3.
- ²⁴ *Brooklyn Eagle*, May 3, 1891, 2.

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- ²⁵ “Wechsler Bros. Dissolution” *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 26, 1895. Herman Wechsler died in January 1908.
- ²⁶ “New Dry Goods House,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 7, 1897, 5.
- ²⁷ “\$500,000 of Stock Sold,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 12, 1897, 1.
- ²⁸ “Store Opening Put Off,” *New York Times*, September 28, 1907.
- ²⁹ *Brooklyn Eagle*, clipping, July 25, 1922. The store was originally located at the corner of Fulton and Bridge Street. Prior to 1946, the exterior was refaced in light-colored masonry. Today, the façade is obscured by ribbed metal panels, possibly from the 1950s. Also see “Hyman Zeitz Dies After An Operation,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1930, 25.
- ³⁰ After 1909, Silsbe, a restaurant in the building until 1922, installed a marquee. It was removed in 1928. *Brooklyn Eagle*, September 6, 1928.
- ³¹ *Brooklyn Eagle*, clipping, November 1, 1925.
- ³² Morris Lapidus, *An Architecture of Joy* (Seemann Publishing, 1979), 114; Morris Lapidus, *Too Much is Never Enough*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1996), 123, 126-27. Also see *Brooklyn Eagle*, clipping, March 3, 1947 and October 11, 1945. For images of Lapidus interiors, see the Library of Congress website.
- ³³ “Oasis of Shopping Calm,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1966; “Brooklyn’s Fulton Street Stores Face Rivals Calmly,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1967.
- ³⁴ “Martin’s Purchased By Seedman Group,” *New York Times*, October 15, 1977, 35; “Martin’s to Close Fulton St. Store,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1979, D8.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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

The Commission further finds that the Offerman Building, located on Fulton Street is a striking example of the Romanesque Revival style; that it was constructed in two phases between 1890 and 1893 and was commissioned by Henry Offerman, who made his fortune in the sugar industry, to serve as the S. Wechsler and Brother store; that Peter J. Lauritzen was the architect; that he was born in Demark in 1847 and after working in Washington, D. C. moved to New York City in 1883 where he designed numerous commercial structures and private clubs; that most of his projects were inspired by medieval sources and incorporate multi-story arcades, textured stone, decorative moldings and reliefs that identify the dates of construction, the name of the building, and the owner; that the Offerman Building had a succession of retail tenants, most notably, Martin's Department Store, which occupied the structure from 1924 to 1979; and that despite alterations to the lower floors on Fulton Street, the Offerman Building retains much of its original character and that it remains one of the most impressive structures in downtown Brooklyn.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21) 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 Offerman Building, 503-13 Fulton Street and 234-248 Duffield Street, and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 145, Lot 35, as its Landmark Site.

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



Offerman Building
503-13 Fulton Street and 234-48 Duffield Street, Brooklyn
Viewed from Hoyt Street
Photo: Matthew A. Postal



Offerman Building
View of both elevations from intersection of Fulton and Duffield Streets
Photo: Carl Forster



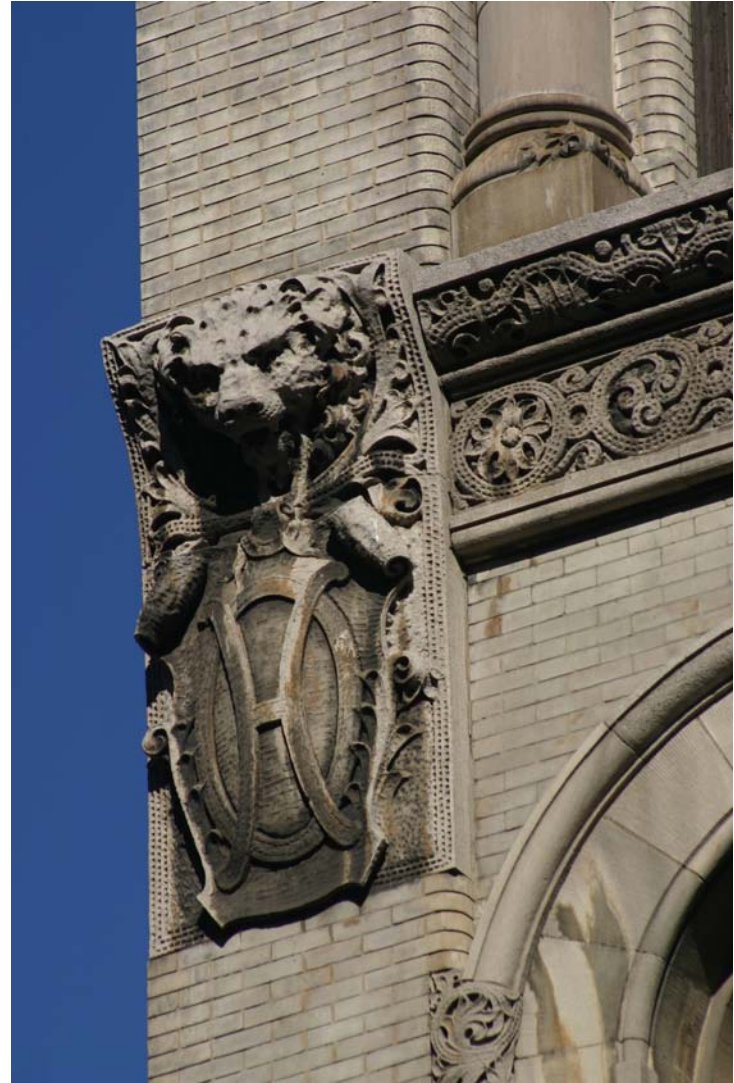
Offerman Building
Duffield Street elevation
Photo: Carl Forster



Offerman Building
Fulton Street elevation, details, seventh floor and pavilion
Photos: Carl Forster



Offerman Building
Fulton Street, details, lower floors and base
Photos: Carl Forster



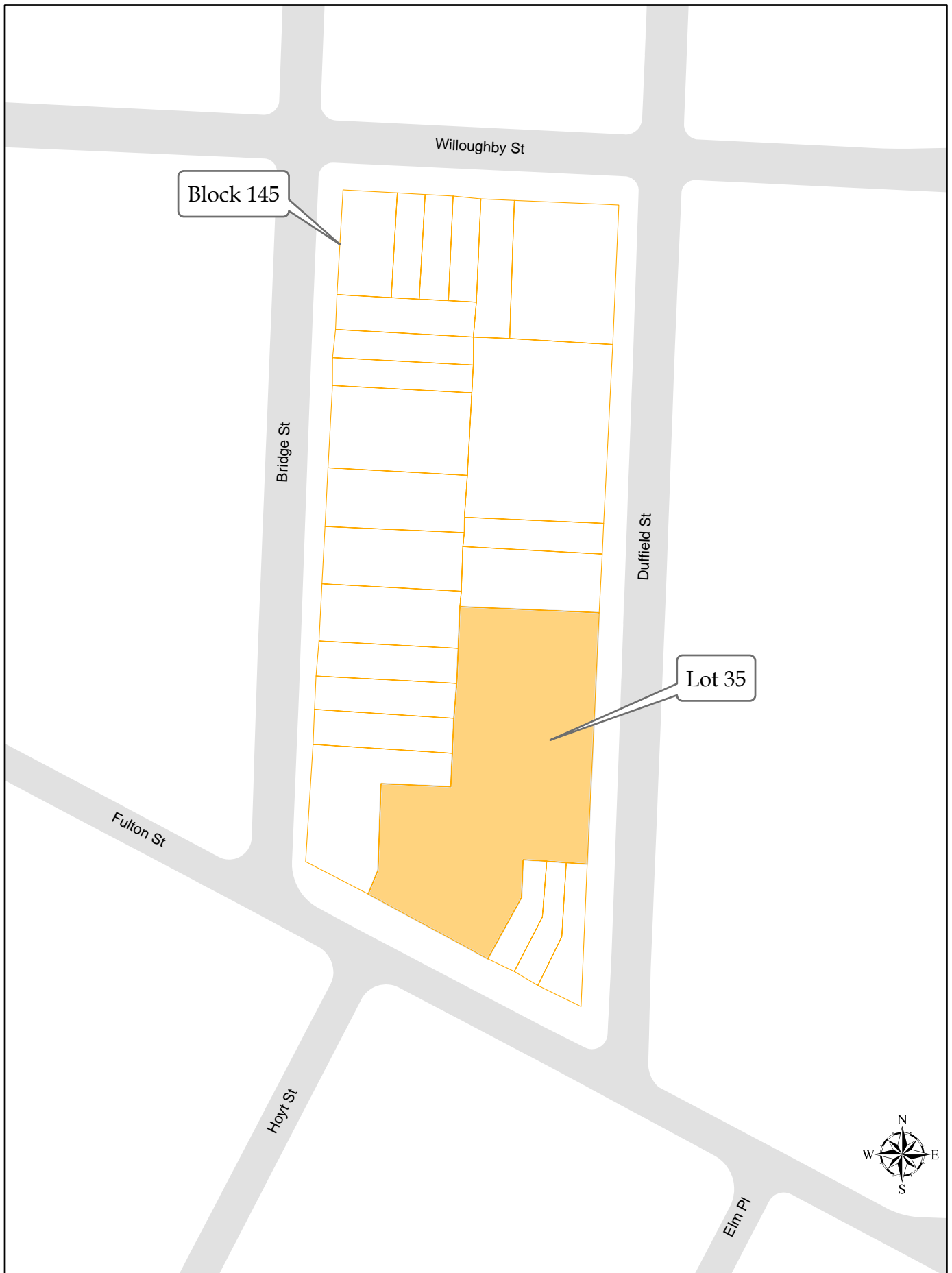
Offerman Building
Fulton Street elevation, details
Photos: Carl Forster



Offerman Building
Duffield Street elevation
Photos: Carl Forster



Offerman Building
Duffield Street elevation, details
Photos: Matthew A. Postal and Carl Forster



Offerman Building
Landmark Site: Brooklyn Tax Map Block 145, Lot 35
Source: Dept. of City Planning MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003



Offerman Building
 Landmark Site: Brooklyn Tax Map Block 145, Lot 35
 Source: Sanborn, Building & Property Atlas of Brooklyn (2003), vol. 2. pl. 22