

HAMPTON SHOPS BUILDING, 18-20 East 50th Street, Manhattan
Built, 1915-16; architects, Rouse & Goldstone, with Joseph L. Steinam

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1285, Lot 59

On September 13, 2016, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Hampton Shops Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. Four people spoke in support of designation, including representatives of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, and the Municipal Art Society of New York. The Real Estate Board of New York submitted written testimony in opposition to designation. State Senator Brad Hoylman submitted written testimony in support of designation.

Summary

The former Hampton Shops Building rises on the south side of East 50th Street, near Madison Avenue. Constructed in 1915-16, when this section of East Midtown was being transformed into a major commercial district, the architect was Rouse & Goldstone, as well as Joseph L. Steinam. Designed in the neo-Gothic or Perpendicular Gothic style, it has an 11-story tripartite facade clad with grey terra cotta resembling granite. This distinctive style was chosen because not only did it complement the St. Patrick's Cathedral complex, which the building faces, but it also evoked the kinds of traditional-style furniture that Hampton Shops sold. During the 1910s, many midtown skyscrapers were built on small lots – parcels that were once occupied by row houses. Designed before passage of the 1916 zoning ordinance, it has no setbacks, and, like the Woolworth Building and other neo-Gothic structures, cast ornamentation that enhances the facade's verticality. Various writers praised the design, calling it interesting, unique, and “a wide departure from the ordinary loft building.”

Henry Mannes founded the business in the early 1860s. Earlier known as the Grand Rapids Furniture Company, it was renamed Hampton Shops to distinguish his store from rival firms with similar names. Above the center entrance, various carvings identify the original owner. Small heraldic shields display the initials of Hampton Shops, as well as images of chairs and tables. A 1918 advertisement described the store as “a Gothic temple of art” where customers could explore showroom galleries with “interiors of old world charm that equal in authenticity the finest examples in Europe.” Antiques and modern reproductions were available for purchase, as well as paneled walls, molded ceilings, rugs, and “exclusive” draperies. In 1938, after 22 years at this location, Hampton Shops declared bankruptcy and the stock was sold at auction. In subsequent years, the building was subdivided and leased to businesses in the art and design field, including the industrial design firm George Nelson & Co. during 1956-62.

Aside from modifications to the base, the facade retains most of the original materials and ornament. An ambitious early 20th-century commercial design, it recalls the era when fashionable retailers began to replace private residences in midtown Manhattan.



BUILDING DESCRIPTION

The 11-story Hampton Shops Building is located on the south side of East 50th Street, near Madison Avenue. Originally a free-standing structure above the fourth story, subsequent construction hides most of the east and west facades, except for small sections that remain visible near the top.

Historic features: grey terra-cotta facade laid in random ashlar pattern, first-story arcade with three pointed arches, metal-and-glass lighting fixtures flank center arch, service entrance on left side, third-story flagpole, tracery spandrels, top-story arcade with three pointed arches.

Alterations: glass-and-metal infill inside left and right arches of first-story arcade, center awning with metal poles, recessed glass window in center arch, center doors, signs flanking center arch, metal conduits on both sides of center arch, right entrance cladding and address sign, two flagpoles at top of arcade, variously-sized louvers and windows at second story, double-hung windows, roof pediment and flanking towers have been partly removed.

HISTORY

Evolution of East Midtown¹

In 1831, the recently-established New York & Harlem Railroad signed an agreement with New York State permitting the operation of steam locomotives on Fourth (now Park) Avenue, from 23rd Street to the Harlem River. Five years later, in 1836, several important street openings occurred in East Midtown. These included 42nd Street, Lexington Avenue and Madison Avenue. Initially, trains ran at grade, sharing Fourth Avenue with pedestrians and vehicles. In 1856, locomotives were banned below 42nd Street -- the current site of a maintenance barn and fuel lot. Though rail passengers continued south by horse car, this decision set the stage for East Midtown to become an important transit hub.

Cornelius Vanderbilt acquired control of the New York & Harlem, Hudson River, and the New York Central Railroads in 1863-67. Under his direction, a single terminal for the three railroads was planned and built, known as Grand Central Depot (1868-71, demolished). It was a large structure, consisting of an L-shaped head-house inspired by the Louvre in Paris, with entrances on 42nd Street and Vanderbilt Avenue, as well as a 652-foot-long train shed. The area immediately north, mainly between 45th and 49th Streets, served as a train yard. Traversed by pedestrian and vehicular bridges, this busy facility occupied an irregularly-shaped site that extended from Lexington to Madison Avenue.

The earliest surviving buildings in midtown are residences in Murray Hill, directly south of 42nd Street. An 1847 covenant stipulated that all houses be built with brick and stone and many handsome ones survive, particularly east of Park Avenue. Following the Civil War, residential development continued up Fifth Avenue, transforming the area between St. Patrick's Cathedral (1853-88) and Central Park (begun 1857, both are New York City Landmarks). Though most of the large mansions -- many owned by members of the Vanderbilt family -- have been lost, other impressive residences survive on the side streets, between Park and Fifth Avenues. New York City Landmarks in the East 50s include: The Villard Houses (1883-85),

William & Ada Moore House (1898-1900), Morton & Nellie Plant House (1903-05), and the Fiske Harkness House (1871/1906).

In 1902, 15 railroad passengers were killed in a rear-end collision in the Park Avenue Tunnel, near 56th Street. In response to this tragic accident, William J. Wilgus, chief engineer of the New York Central Railroad, proposed that not only should steam locomotives be eliminated from Manhattan but that the terminal be expanded and completely rebuilt. The city agreed and Grand Central Terminal (a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark) was completed in February 1913.

Wilgus envisioned the new terminal as part of a city-within-the-city, knitted together by more than two dozen buildings constructed above the newly-submerged rail tracks. Faced with tan brick and limestone, these handsome neo-classical style buildings formed an understated backdrop to the monumental Beaux-Arts style terminal. A key example is the New York Central Building, a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark. Erected by the railroad in 1927-29, it stands directly above the tracks and incorporates monumental archways that direct automobile traffic towards the Park Avenue Viaduct (1917-19, a New York City Landmark).

The new terminal and subway attracted considerable commercial development to East Midtown, especially near 42nd Street, the original route of the IRT subway. Most of these buildings date to the 1910s and 1920s. In contrast to the neo-classical, City Beautiful, aesthetics that shaped Terminal City, these distinctive skyscrapers frequently incorporate unusual terra-cotta ornamentation inspired by medieval (and later, Art Deco) sources. Memorable examples include: the Bowery Savings Bank Building (1921-23, 1931-33) and the Chanin Building (1927-29, both New York City Landmarks).

In 1918, subway service was extended up Lexington Avenue, north of 42nd Street. Though Terminal City had been planned with several hotels, such as the Biltmore and Commodore (both have been re-clad), additional rooms were needed. A substantial number of new hotels would rise on Lexington Avenue, between 47th and 50th Streets, including the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel (1929-32) and the Summit Hotel (1959-61, both are New York City Landmarks).

Following the end of the Second World War, the New York Central Railroad struggled with debt and entered a significant period of decline. In response, it began to terminate lot leases and sell off real estate properties. The impact of the situation was most powerfully felt on Park Avenue. Apartment buildings and hotels were quickly replaced by an influx of glassy office towers, with such pioneering mid-20th century Modern works as Lever House (1949-52, a New York City Landmark) and the Seagram Building (1954-56, a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark). The success of these and other projects helped make Park Avenue (and East Midtown) one of Manhattan's most prestigious corporate addresses.

Site

The Hampton Shops Building rises on the south side of East 50th Street, between Fifth and Madison Avenues. It stands across from the St. Patrick's Cathedral complex (begun 1853, a New York City Landmark), at the east end of the block where the Ladies Chapel (1901-06) and Cardinal's residence (c. 1880) are located. At the start of the 20th century, Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue were among Manhattan's most prestigious thoroughfares. Lined with large private homes, this section of Manhattan had attracted some of New York City's wealthiest families, including Vanderbilts and Rockefellers. The site where Rockefeller Center (begun 1932, a New York City Landmark) is located was owned by Columbia University, which began

selling various properties along West 47th and 48th Streets in 1904. Three years later, the trustees announced plans to “make leases without restrictions” on their remaining Fifth Avenue properties, clearing the way for future commercial development.² *The New York Times* observed:

How soon these changes will be brought about there is no telling, but it has been the experience of other neighborhoods under similar conditions, that with the bars once down the transformation takes place even more rapidly than most people would be willing to predict.³

Furthermore, in 1909 and 1911, the road bed was widened. Not only were the sidewalks reduced in width, but stoops, lawns, and fencing were removed, giving Fifth Avenue and the adjoining side streets a less-residential appearance.

Prior to construction of the Hampton Shops Building, a three- and five-story house occupied the site. Andrew Jeffries Garvey, an associate of William “Boss” Tweed, acquired the property in the 1880s. For two decades, both buildings were leased to Arthur H. Cutler, who operated the elite Cutler School for boys. The lease was assigned to W.W. and T.M. Hall, a residential developer, in 1908,⁴ who sold it to the Grand Rapids Furniture Company in October 1914.⁵

Named for Grand Rapids, Michigan, a major center of 19th-century furniture production, the company was founded by Henry Mannes in 1861.⁶ To distinguish the company from similarly-named furniture dealers in the New York City area, he later changed the name to Hampton Shops.⁷ Though an August 1912 advertisement for “The Well Furnished Sleeping Chamber” featured both company names at 34 and 36 West 32nd Street, only Hampton Shops was used to describe the East 50th Street location.⁸ Following the death of Henry Mannes in 1915, his son, Owen Henry Mannes (1863-1934) became president of the firm.⁹

Design and Construction

In October 1914 the *Real Estate Record and Guide* reported that the houses would be “altered . . . into showrooms and salesrooms.”¹⁰ The following week, however, it was announced that the Grand Rapids Furniture Company would “improve the property with a twelve-story structure for its exclusive occupancy.”¹¹ Plans (NB 36-15) were filed with the Bureau of Buildings in February 1915 for a \$200,000 fireproof steel-frame loft building¹² and construction commenced in June 1915. The Bing & Bing Construction Company was the general contractor and the Akron Realty Company, a subsidiary of Bing & Bing, provided a \$160,000 loan.¹³ Founded by Leo and Alexander Bing in 1906, these real estate companies were responsible for many early 20th-century residential buildings in Manhattan.

The New-York Tribune reported in August 1915 that the project was “rapidly springing upward, to become one of the most prominent architectural features of the upper Fifth Avenue district.”¹⁴ Construction concluded in mid-January 1916 and by March newspapers described the building as occupied. *The New York Times* praised the interiors, writing that “they give a new idea of what can be done with the furnishings and decorations of the home.”¹⁵

During the 1910s, East 50th Street, between Madison and Fifth Avenues, was mainly residential. The Hampton Shops Building was erected on a 56-foot-wide plot flanked by groups of four-story brownstone townhouses. Visible from Fifth and Madison Avenues, the side walls had windows and were painted with advertisements for the store.¹⁶

The Hampton Shops Building was designed in the neo-Gothic style. It has a tripartite facade with double-height arcades, sometimes described as loggia, at the base and uppermost stories. The base has five bays. While the low arch at the far left was planned as a freight entrance, the low arch at the far right originally had steps that led to a private office. The deep center arches are taller. These openings led to a vestibule and foyer, as well as a “great Gothic Hall, twenty-five feet in height, which [took] in the entire first floor.”¹⁷ The lower part of the facade is decorated with shields that display the company initials (HS) and heraldic symbols, as well as images of chairs and tables.

During the 1910s, the neo-Gothic style became a common alternative to Beaux Arts classicism, shaping the design of major skyscrapers like the Woolworth Building (a New York City Landmark) and many mid-block commercial structures. Furthermore, the Hampton Shops Building was intended to complement the neighboring cathedral, an important example of the Gothic Revival style, while evoking the various types of traditional English furnishings that the store carried and sold. *The New York Tribune* called the building’s style “a free adaptation of a late school of Gothic architecture,” while *The New York Times* and the *Real Estate Record and Builder’s Guide* referred to it as “Perpendicular Gothic,” a variant favored by English architects at the end of the 14th and 15th centuries. Notable examples include King’s College Chapel at Cambridge (1446-1515), which has many architectural elements with a strong vertical emphasis, particularly window mullions and finials. In the Hampton Shops Building, the architects used similar features to lead the eye skyward, such as continuous piers, pointed arches, elaborate tracery, equilateral triangles, and roof-top finials.

Newspapers praised the design, calling it “interesting,” “unique,” and a “wide departure from the ordinary loft building.”¹⁸ *The New York Times* commented that this “lofty Gothic edifice” was “of more than passing interest to every lover of the beautiful in New York”¹⁹ and architect Aymar Embury III wrote:

The building for the Hampton shops is of all those in the Gothic style the most interesting and in many respects the most consistent; it is a very lovely piece of design in the Gothic manner, with a full realization of the requirements of the modern office building and of modern construction.²⁰

In 1920 Helen Bullitt Lowry published an essay on the growing relationship between the arts and commerce. Though she appreciated many recent commercial structures in Manhattan, Lowry commented: “Naturally, the desire to tell the story in terms of stone sometimes overreaches itself. The Hampton Shops Building, on West [sic] Fiftieth Street, for example, out-Goths the very Goths in its efforts to exploit “the period” quality in its business.”²¹

Architects

Rouse & Goldstone, and Joseph L. Steinam, designed the Hampton Shops Building. William Lawrence Rouse (1874-1963) and Lafayette Anthony Goldstone (1876-1956) established their partnership in 1909. Rouse attended the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey, while Goldstone had no formal architectural training. Prior to 1909, he worked as an apprentice draftsman for Bates & Barlow, followed by positions with Cleverdon & Putzel, George Pelham, and Norcross Brothers. Though Rouse & Goldstone is probably best known for large apartment houses, especially on the Upper East and Upper West Sides, during the years that led up to the Hampton Shops commission they designed a large number of 6-to-12 story loft

buildings in midtown Manhattan. Rouse & Goldstone dissolved their partnership in late 1926. Rouse remained active until 1939 and Goldstone continued to practice into the late 1940s.

Joseph L. Steinam graduated from the Columbia School of Mines in c. 1894. He formed a partnership with George Mort Pollard in 1896. This firm designed many pioneering studio buildings, including 130 and 140 West 57th Street (1907-08, a New York City Landmark) and several structures on West 67th Street (part of the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District). From 1912 to 1916, he occasionally partnered with Rouse & Goldstone. In addition to the Hampton Shops Building, they collaborated on a 16-story loft building at 6-8 West 32nd Street (1913-14) and an addition to the Hebrew Technical Institute (1914-15, altered).

Later History

Hampton Shops Inc. purchased the site from Helena B. Garvey Hayden in March 1922. Following a remodeling of the interiors in 1937,²² the company declared bankruptcy and the entire stock was sold at public auction during December 1938, including “Antique Period Furniture, Fine Reproductions, Brand New Hampton Shops Originals.”²³ In subsequent years, the building had various owners and a varied group of tenants. According to a September 1951 Certificate of Occupancy, window displays were “limited to paintings, statuary, and tapestries – there shall be no projecting signs, or another sign, except for that required by law, there shall be no loading or unloading between 8 A.M. and 6 P.M., the premises shall not be operated on Sunday.” Such limits may have reflected the site’s proximity to the cathedral and the structure’s origins as a commercial structure in what was once a “restricted retail district.”²⁴

18 East 50th Street was acquired by the Carrier Corporation, a manufacturer of air conditioners, to serve as its New York office in 1945, followed by A. M. Corporation, a British importer, as an investment in 1948. The Museum of Costume Art, now part of The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute, leased an entire floor during 1943-46. Other notable tenants included George Nelson & Co., Industrial Design, during 1956-62. In 1977, the building was acquired by Pamela Equities (now Pan-Am Equities), owner of the New York Health and Racquet Club, which “specialized in converting existing properties into club facilities, often with residential or commercial space as well.”²⁵ At present, the athletic facility occupies the lower four floors and the rest of the building is leased as office space.

Researched and written by
Matthew A. Postal
Research Department

NOTES

¹ This section is mostly based on designation reports prepared by members of the research staff at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Also see Kurt C. Schlichting, *Grand Central Terminal* (John Hopkins University Press, 2003), Robert A. M. Stern and others, *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999), Robert A. M. Stern and others, *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Rizzoli Books, 1983) and Robert A. M. Stern and others, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between Two World Wars* (New York Rizzoli Books, 1987).

² Ronda Wist, *On Fifth Avenue: Then and Now* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992), 84.

³ "Columbia Blocks on Fifth Avenue," *The New York Times*, March 3, 1907, 17.

⁴ "Remarkable Lease in Perpetuity Near Fifth Avenue," *The New York Times*, January 11, 1914, viewed at nytimes.com

⁵ *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, October 3, 1914, 550.

⁶ "Hampton Shops Stock To Be Sold at Auction," *The New York Herald Tribune*, June 4, 1938, 14.

⁷ See *Grand Rapids Furniture Record*, December 1914, 390.

⁸ After the opening of Hampton Shops, The Grand Rapids Furniture Company remained on West 32nd Street. See advertisements, *The New York Times*, August 29, 1912, 3; *The New Country Life*, May 1918, 114.

⁹ "Owen Henry Mannes," *The New York Times*, August 28, 1934, 21.

¹⁰ *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, October 3, 1914, 550.

¹¹ *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, October 10, 1914, 613.

¹² *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, February 6, 1915, 232; "New Loft Building," *The New York Times*, February 7, 1915, XX4.

¹³ *Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*, June 5, 1915, 971.

¹⁴ "Design of Loft Facing Cathedral," *New York Tribune*, August 1, 1915, C3.

¹⁵ "Hampton Shops in Gothic Home," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1916, 13.

¹⁶ The building's east facade is now hidden by 444 Madison Avenue, completed in 1931. The west facade is mostly hidden by 623 Fifth Avenue, erected in 1990.

¹⁷ "Hampton Shop in New Quarters," *Real Estate Record and Guide*, March 18, 1916, 424.

¹⁸ "Hampton Shop in New Quarters," "Hampton Shops a Unique Gallery Type Structure," *New York Herald Tribune*, June 18, 1916, 2, and "Hampton Shops in Gothic Home."

¹⁹ "Hampton Shops in Gothic Home."

²⁰ Aymar Embury III, "From Twenty-Third Street up," *The Brickbuilder* (November 1916), 283.

²¹ Helen Bullitt Lowry, "Art's New Job of Salesmanship," *The New York Times*, August 15, 1920, 42.

²² "Hampton Shops Are Remodeled," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, December 18, 1937, viewed at Brooklyn.newspapers.com

²³ "Public Auction Sale," *The New York Times*, November 30, 1938, 8.

²⁴ Certificate of Occupancy (#31109), Department of Buildings, New York, September 26, 1951.

²⁵ "Former Army Induction Center to Become a Health Club," *The New York Times*, March 1, 1978, viewed at nytimes.com

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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

The Commission further finds that the Hampton Shops Building was constructed in 1915-16, when this section of East Midtown, Manhattan, was being transformed into a major commercial district; that the architect was Rouse & Goldstone, as well as Joseph L. Steinam; that it was designed in the neo-Gothic or Perpendicular Gothic style; that this style was chosen to complement St. Patrick's Cathedral, which the building faces, and to evoke the kinds of traditional style furniture that Hampton Shops sold; that the 11-story tripartite facade is clad with gray terra cotta that resembles granite; that during the 1910s many midtown skyscrapers were built on small lots, parcels that were once occupied by row houses; that this building was designed before passage of the 1916 zoning ordinance and has no setbacks; that like the Woolworth Building and other neo-Gothic skyscrapers, it has cast ornament that enhances the main facade's verticality; that contemporary writers praised the store's design, calling it interesting, unique, and a "wide departure from the ordinary loft building;" that the business was founded by Henry Mannes in the 1860s and was earlier known as the Grand Rapids Furniture Company; that it was renamed Hampton Shops to distinguish the business from rival firms with similar names; that small heraldic contain the company's initials, as well as images of chairs and tables; that a 1918 advertisement described the store as "a Gothic temple of art," where customers could explore showroom galleries with "interiors of old world charm that equal in authenticity the finest examples in Europe;" that Hampton Shops declared bankruptcy in 1938 and in subsequent years the building was subdivided and leased to tenants in the art and design fields; that the main facade retains most the original materials and ornament; and that this early 20th century skyscraper handsomely recalls the era when fashionable retailers began replacing private residences in midtown.

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 18-20 East 50th Street, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1285, Lot 59, as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Diana Chapin, Wellington Chen
Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, John Gustafsson
Adi Shamir-Baron, Kim Vauss, Commissioners



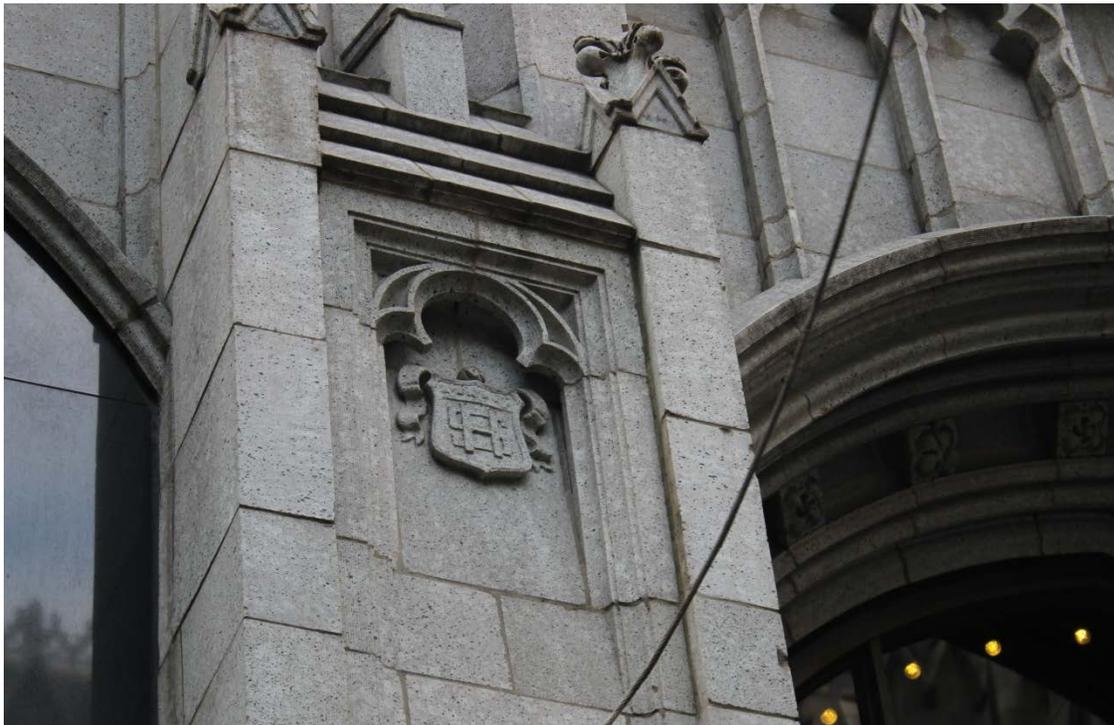
Hampton Shops Building
18-20 East 50th Street
Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1285, Lot 59
Photo: Sarah Moses, 2016



Hampton Shops Building
Upper floor / First floor
Photos: Matthew A. Postal and Sarah Moses, 2016



Hampton Shops Building
Main facade
Photo: Matthew A. Postal, 2016



Hampton Shops Building
Furniture reliefs + store initials, first floor
Photos: Matthew A. Postal, 2016

Hampton Shops Building I LP-2580



Graphic Source: MapInfo, Edition 1811, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DNY, Date: 11.22.2016