



KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

ERIK KULLESEID
Commissioner

RESOURCE EVALUATION

DATE: November 4, 2021

STAFF: Linda Mackey

PROPERTY: Gimbel's Administration Building and Skybridge

MCD: Manhattan

ADDRESS: 116 West 32nd Street

COUNTY: New York

PROJECT REF: 20PR03875

USN: 06101.021925 and 06101.021926

- I. Property is individually listed on SR/NR:
name of listing:
- Property is a contributing component of a SR/NR district:
name of district:
- II. Property meets eligibility criteria.
- Property contributes to a district which appears to meet eligibility criteria.

Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
- B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possess high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;
- D. Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Based on the information submitted, the Gimbel's Administration Building and Skybridge are eligible for the National Register under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a representative example of commercial loft design by architect William H. Gompert, and as a rare, high quality architect-designed skybridge by the firm Shreve and Lamb in Manhattan. The Gimbel's Administration Building and Skybridge may also possess significance under Criterion A in the area of commerce for their association with the Gimbel Brothers Department Store, one of Midtown Manhattan's grand shopping emporiums of the early twentieth century.

Loton Slawson constructed the Gimbel's Administration Building (originally the Cuyler Building), between 1911 and 1912 as a loft and commercial building for the Cuyler Realty Company. In 1925, the Gimbel Brothers company purchased the building for administrative use, connecting it via the skybridge to the Gimbel Brothers Department Store located across West 32nd Street, which was constructed in 1910, and the department store's executive offices were then relocated to the Administration Building. In 1973, the British-American Tobacco Company purchased Gimbel Brothers, and by the end of the 1980s, all the Gimbel Brothers stores across the country had closed. In 1989, the department store at Sixth Avenue and West 32nd Street was substantially renovated and is now the Manhattan Mall up to the second level and office building use on the nine levels

above. The Administration Building and Manhattan Mall (and the skybridge) are now under separate ownership.

The sixteen-story Gimbel's Administration Building at 116 West 32nd Street extends through the block to West 31st Street. The north and south elevations have a similar design with tripartite arrangements of base, shaft, and capital, and they are divided into three bays, with groupings of three windows per bay. Built before the 1916 zoning law, the building is massed without setbacks. On each elevation, the three-story base is faced in stone and crowned by a cornice. The upper floors are faced with brick. Storefronts on both elevations have been altered. The building features Classical Revival motifs that include shields and floral swags on metal spandrel panels, stone cartouches, pilasters, and denticulated cornices. On the east, side elevation, overlooking the adjacent shorter building, a painted "Gimbels" sign is faintly visible.

The three-level copper skybridge was completed in 1925 and spans West 32nd Street between the Gimbel's Administration Building and the former Gimbel Brothers Department Store to the north. The skybridge is located in the eastern window bay at the tenth through twelfth floors. Weathered with a magnificent green-patina copper cladding, the skybridge is Art Deco in form with Classical ornament including fluted pilasters and panels containing diamond and square patterns. The underside of the skybridge is coffered. Research indicates only a handful of historic skybridges are extant in New York City.

William H. Gompert worked for the firms of McKim, Mead & White, Maynicke & Franke, and Harding & Gooch before opening his own office around 1906 where he specialized in commercial and institutional buildings. In 1923, he was elected president of the Brooklyn Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. That same year he was appointed Chief Architect and Superintendent of School Buildings for the New York City Board of Education. He remained Chief Architect and Superintendent until 1927, overseeing the design and construction of some 170 new schools and additions. Gompert is also credited with designing the Burrell Building, Theodore Roosevelt High School, DeWitt Clinton High School, New York Teachers Training College, and the Embassy Hotel, all in New York City.

The architectural firm of Shreve and Lamb (later Shreve, Lamb, and Harmon in 1929), was one of New York City's premier design teams, known primarily for their modern office buildings and especially the Empire State Building. The three principal designers had traditional architectural educations and experience with important New York firms before they joined together and created buildings specifically adapted to the design requirements and technological advances of the modern era. The firm worked principally on commercial office buildings, although they also designed a number of estates and residences in the New York suburbs, and a few apartment houses in Manhattan.

Sources:

AKRF. *Empire Station Complex Project – Additional Architectural Survey Information*. October 8, 2021.

"W.H. Gompert, 71, School Architect; Former City Official, Long Ill, Dies – Designed Buildings Costing 200 Millions." *New York Times*, May 21, 1946.