

BROOKLYN UNION GAS COMPANY BUILDING, 176 Remsen Street (aka 172-178 Remsen Street), Brooklyn.

Built 1914; Architect Frank Freeman.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 255, Lot 36 in part, consisting of the property bounded by a line beginning at a point on the southern side of Remsen Street distant 200 feet westerly from the corner formed by the intersection of the southern side of Remsen Street and the western side of Court Street, continuing southerly and parallel to the western side of Court Street 100 feet, westerly and parallel to the southern side of Remsen Street 98 feet, northerly and parallel to the western side of Court Street 100 feet to the southern side of Remsen Street, easterly along the southern side of Remsen Street 98 feet to the point of the beginning.

On August 10, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Public Hearing Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Three people spoke in favor of designation, including a representative of the property owner as well as representatives of the Brooklyn Heights Association and the Historic Districts Council. The support of Brooklyn Community Board 2 was also read into the record during the public hearing.

Summary

The substantial neo-Classical style Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building was constructed in 1914 as the new headquarters for the borough's oldest and most important utility company and was designed by noted architect Frank Freeman.

Downtown Brooklyn was first developed as a commercial center during the second half of the 19th century, particularly following the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 and the completion of the Kings County Elevated Railroad in 1888. This commercial center continued to grow after the consolidation of Greater New York in 1898, and during the first several decades of the 20th century much of the area was redeveloped with larger office buildings, including this eight-story structure erected for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company at 176 Remsen Street.

The Brooklyn Union Gas Company traces its origins to 1824 when a group of entrepreneurs including Joseph Sprague and Alden Spooner proposed establishing the Brooklyn Gas Light Company. The firm won its first major contract in 1849 when the municipality of Brooklyn engaged the company to provide street illumination for the growing city. As Brooklyn continued to expand, rival gas companies were formed to serve newly-urbanized neighborhoods such as Cobble Hill, Fort Greene, and Park Slope. Competition between the gas companies grew particularly heated in the 1880s but all seven of the major Brooklyn firms eventually merged in 1895 to form the Brooklyn Union Gas Company. During the early 20th century the firm continued to grow by creating new markets for its product, even as electricity began to replace gas for illumination purposes. As an indication of its success, in 1912 the company began to plan for a new headquarters and inaugurated this building in 1914.

Frank Freeman was one of the most successful Brooklyn architects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He is best known for his muscular Richardsonian Romanesque Revival buildings, although he had a long and varied career during which he worked in a wide range of building types and architectural



styles. His design for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building employs the Classically-inspired architectural vocabulary that characterized many of Freeman's post-Columbian Exposition commissions. The two-story granite base in particular is articulated with Doric-order ornament, including a projecting entrance portico flanked by fluted columns and capped with an entablature decorated with triglyphs and metopes. Much of the building's architectural decoration is also symbolic of the structure's original role as the headquarters of an important gas company, depicting such devices as flaming torches and blazing oil lamps. A review of the building in *Architecture and Building* noted, "it gives a first impression of substantiality and of wholesome good construction."

The Brooklyn Union Gas Company continued to occupy its offices on Remsen Street until moving to larger quarters on Montague Street in 1962. The building was subsequently acquired by St. Francis College, which converted the structure into an academic facility.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Early History and Development of Downtown Brooklyn¹

During the 19th century the area that now comprises the Borough of Brooklyn grew from a sleepy hamlet of farms and rural estates into the third most populous city in the nation. Much of the early development has been attributed to the introduction in 1814 of steam-powered service on the primary ferry route between Brooklyn and Manhattan. Two years later in 1816 the Village of Brooklyn, with an initial population of approximately 4,000 citizens, was incorporated within the existing Town of Brooklyn. The population of the area continued to increase so that in 1834 the City of Brooklyn was incorporated with a population of nearly 25,000 residents.² The following year a triangle of land at the intersection of Fulton and Joralemon Streets was acquired from the Remsen and Pierrepont estates and a magnificent new City Hall planned for the site.³ While the Panic of 1837 temporarily halted construction on this building, the population of Brooklyn continued to grow rapidly during the late 1830s and especially during the 1840s as an increasing number of immigrants from Ireland and Germany began to arrive in the New York area. Construction of Brooklyn City Hall resumed in 1845 and was completed in 1848, albeit at a diminished scale from what had originally been planned. At the beginning of the 1860s Brooklyn had more than a quarter million residents and was the third most populous urban center in the nation.

It was during this period of unprecedented growth in the second half of the 19th century that a distinct downtown began to crystallize in the streets surrounding Brooklyn City Hall. Several new civic structures were concentrated on the block located immediately across Joralemon Street, with the Kings County Court House (1861-62), the Brooklyn Municipal Building (1876-78), and the Hall of Records (1885-87). The stretch of Montague Street between Clinton and Court Streets in turn became the home for many of Brooklyn's newly established cultural institutions as organizations such as the Brooklyn Academy of Music (1861), the Mercantile Library Association of the City of Brooklyn (1865-68), and the Brooklyn Art Association (1869-72) moved into fashionable new buildings on the block.

While commercial activity continued to cluster around the Fulton Ferry landing into the last quarter of the 19th century, by the 1880s—particularly with the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883 and the completion of the Kings County Elevated Railroad along Fulton Street in 1888—it had become clear that downtown Brooklyn would become the commercial heart of the city in addition to its civic and cultural center. Speculative office buildings such as the Garfield (1882, J. C. Cady, demolished) and the Franklin (1886-87, Parfitt Brothers), both developed by prominent Brooklyn businessmen Abiel Abbott Low, soon sprang up on the blocks surrounding

Brooklyn City Hall. This commercial center continued to grow in the years following the consolidation of Great New York in 1898. Within a few decades many of these same block-fronts facing the renamed Brooklyn Borough Hall were redeveloped with tall skyscrapers, while the section of Montague Street that had previously housed the borough's cultural institutions was given over to the banking industry.⁴ On neighboring Remsen Street, the venerable Brooklyn Union Gas Company erected a new headquarters building in 1914 immediately adjacent to their old office building.

Gas Lighting in Brooklyn and the Brooklyn Union Gas Company⁵

Two important milestones in the emergence of Brooklyn as a significant urban center were the formation of the Brooklyn Gas Light Company in the 1820s and the commencement of gas service in the city in the 1840s. The manufacture of gas for illumination and other purposes began in Europe around the turn of the 19th century.⁶ The first commercial exploitation of manufactured gas in the United States occurred in Baltimore in 1816 and service was established in Manhattan during 1823 by the New York Gas Light Company. The following year, in 1824, a group of entrepreneurs including Joseph Sprague and Alden Spooner began hatching plans to establish a similar firm in Brooklyn.⁷ In April 1825 the New York State Legislature granted a charter for the Brooklyn Gas Light Company, giving it the “power and authority to manufacture, make and sell gas...for the purpose of lighting the streets, buildings, manufactories, gardens, &c. situate in said town and village of Brooklyn.”⁸ While a board of directors was chosen and stock for the new venture sold, the Village of Brooklyn declined to engage the firm for the lighting of its streets; since civic contracts were still the primary business of gas companies at that time, the Brooklyn Gas Light Company was temporarily disbanded in 1834. Interest in the operation was revived in 1847 and by 1849 the firm had won its contract from the City of Brooklyn, established a gas works on Wallabout Bay near the Navy Yard, and had commenced service through more than six miles of pipe.⁹ In 1857 the company moved its offices to a new building on Remsen Street half a block from the new Brooklyn City Hall.

From its inception the Brooklyn Gas Light Company operated primarily in the established residential sections along the road to the Fulton Ferry landing, in the area that now comprises Brooklyn Heights, and in Downtown Brooklyn and Fort Greene. As the city expanded outward from this historic core, rival gas companies were established to serve the newly-urbanized neighborhoods.¹⁰ The first major competitor was the Williamsburgh Gas-Light Company, founded in 1850 to serve what was then the independent Town of Williamsburgh.¹¹ In 1858 the Citizens' Gas-Light Company was incorporated to cover the territory south of Atlantic Avenue and west of the Gowanus Canal, including all of Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill, and Carroll Gardens. The People's Gas-Light Company was founded in 1864—although it did not begin operation until 1870—and supplied much of Clinton Hill. The Nassau Gas-Light Company was established in 1870 serving Bedford-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights, while the Metropolitan Gas-Light Company was organized the following year in 1871 and encompassed an extensive area covering Park Slope and most of the neighborhoods to the south.

A seventh major operation, the Fulton Municipal Gas Company, was founded in 1879. Unlike its predecessors, it did not attempt to enter the market by covering an underserved territory but chose instead to compete directly with the existing firms by supplying the entire City of Brooklyn. The new company enjoyed the backing of Standard Oil, which gave it access to a new manufacturing process known as water-gas that produced an extremely bright light at less cost than the older methods. A bitter price war soon broke out between the Fulton Municipal

and the established gas businesses. By 1883 the Brooklyn, Citizens', Metropolitan, and Williamsburg companies had all succumbed, agreeing to buy gas wholesale from the Fulton Municipal.¹² The Nassau held out longer than the others, waging an aggressive campaign throughout the early months of 1884, but it too eventually reached an accord with its new rival. This truce between the Brooklyn gas companies, while at times uneasy, remained in effect into the early 1890s when a new law capping the consumer price of gas—as well as increasing competition from the electric light—led many to speculate that the separate firms would consolidate into a single corporation.¹³

The Brooklyn Union Gas Company, as the conglomeration of the seven firms was named, was incorporated in 1895. At the time of consolidation the company had more than 100,000 customers, and illumination—including lucrative municipal contracts for street lighting—was still the primary use of manufactured gas. In 1896 James Jourdan, former head of the Fulton Municipal, was named president of Brooklyn Union. In the ensuing years he helped shift the company's focus to domestic uses such as heating and cooking.¹⁴ Jourdan was succeeded in 1910 by his son, James H. Jourdan, who continued to push the company into new markets.¹⁵ The younger Jourdan also sought to increase operating efficiency by erecting a new headquarters that would house all of the various divisions of the firm.¹⁶ Plans for the building were begun as early as 1912 when Brooklyn Union began to acquire the properties immediately to the west of its existing offices. Architect Frank Freeman was hired to design the new building, which opened in 1914 and replaced the three row houses that had previously stood on the site.

Architect Frank Freeman¹⁷

Frank Freeman (1860/61-1949) was born in the township of Barton—later annexed into the city of Hamilton—in Ontario, Canada.¹⁸ His father, Samuel Black Freeman, was a lawyer and politician of local prominence, while his mother, Catherine (Hamilton) Freeman was a daughter of George Hamilton, for whom the city was named.¹⁹ By the early 1880s Freeman had left Hamilton for a trip around Canada; while he was in Winnipeg he created a plan for the proposed town of Garfield (never realized), perhaps his first design commission. In 1883 Freeman immigrated to the United States, first traveling to Chicago and then settling in New York City in 1884.

It is unclear if Freeman had any formal architectural training. Sources indicate he may have begun his professional career in New York as an apprentice in the office of Francis H. Kimball, working on projects such as the Catholic Apostolic Church (1885-86) in Manhattan and the Emmanuel Baptist Church (1887) in Brooklyn (both designated New York City Landmarks).²⁰ By 1887 Freeman had apparently opened his own practice, although he entered into a brief partnership with Lawrence J. O'Connor in 1888 under the firm name O'Connor & Freeman.²¹ O'Connor specialized in the design of ecclesiastical structures for the Roman Catholic Church and the partner's projects included a church building in Rahway, New Jersey, as well as a rectory for the Church of St. Rose and minor interior alterations for St. James Roman Catholic Church, both on the Lower East Side in Manhattan.²²

Perhaps the most important commission in Freeman's early career was the impressive residence erected in 1888 for Herman Behr on Pierrepont Street in Brooklyn Heights (within the Brooklyn Heights Historic District).²³ Designed in the muscular Richardsonian Romanesque Revival style that would characterize much of his early work, the Behr Residence appears to have been Freeman's first commission in Brooklyn and it seems to have won the young Canadian a promising local reputation. When his partnership with O'Connor dissolved at the end

of 1888, Freeman again established with own practice and launched what was to be a long and successful career.²⁴

During the early years of his practice Freeman proved to be an unquestioned master of the Romanesque Revival. In addition the Behr house, his residential work in that style include mansions for Guido Pleissner (1889) and George W. Scheibler (1893) in Brooklyn, Samuel G. Bayne (1889) and Henry F S. Davis (c. 1890) in Manhattan, and Henry J. Crocker (1889) in San Francisco (all demolished). He also designed a number of notable civic and club house buildings in Brooklyn—among them the Thomas Jefferson Association Building (1889-90, demolished), the Germania Club House Building (1889, demolished), the Brooklyn Fire Headquarters (1891, a designated New York City Landmark), and the Bushwick Democratic Club (1891-92, demolished)—as well as commercial structures such as the Hotel Margaret (1889-90, demolished) and the imposing Eagle Warehouse and Storage Company Building (1893, a designated New York City Landmark).²⁵

While best known for his substantial Romanesque Revival designs produced during the late 1880s and early 1890s, Freeman was a highly adaptable architect who worked in a variety of styles throughout his long career. In the early 1890s he produced a number of wood-framed Shingle style houses; the Robert S. Walker Residence (1890, demolished) and the Engineer's House for the Mount Prospect Pumping Station (1890, demolished) were both located in Brooklyn, and he was also responsible for the Edward M. House Residence (1891-92, demolished) in Austin, Texas and a design for a mansion in Dobbs Ferry, New York (1891).²⁶ Towards the turn of the century Freeman produced a number of mansions in the increasingly prevalent Colonial Revival mode. Perhaps the first was the Nelson P. Lewis Residence, erected in 1899 in the rapidly developing suburban neighborhood south of Prospect Park in Brooklyn (within the Prospect Park South Historic District). Similar projects included the nearby Frederick Burrell Residence (1900, demolished) and the James Turner Residence (1905) in Montclair, New Jersey.

The influence of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which opened in 1893 and helped popularize a formal, Classically-inspired architectural vocabulary, can be seen in Freeman's design for the new Brooklyn Savings Bank (1892-94, demolished) at the corner of Pierrepont and Clinton Streets in Brooklyn Heights. Other buildings designed by Freeman in the Classical mode include an addition to the Brooklyn Riding and Driving Club that once stood on Plaza Street near Flatbush Avenue (1895, demolished), the 9th Police Precinct Station House (1895-96, demolished) in Williamsburg, the Crescent Athletic Club Building in Brooklyn Heights (1906, within the Brooklyn Heights Historic District), the Title Guarantee & Trust Company Building in Downtown Brooklyn (1907, demolished), and the Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building. The wide range of Freeman's architectural skills can also be seen in his designs for the Gothic reredos in the Church of the Holy Trinity (1898-99, within the Brooklyn Heights Historic District), the Baroque Orpheum Music Hall on Fulton Street in Brooklyn (1900, demolished), a Mediterranean-inspired cottage for Bayne in White Plains, New York (1906), the Northern Italian Renaissance style Sunday school building for West End Presbyterian Church in Manhattan (1913-14), and the Georgian Revival Harriet Judson YWCA Building (1914) in Brooklyn.

The Design of the Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building²⁷

The Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building is designed in the Classical architectural vocabulary that characterized much of Freeman's post-Columbian Exposition work. A review of

the new building in *Architecture and Building* noted that it was “of simple design, styled from classical motifs” and that “it gives a first impression of substantiality and of wholesome good construction.”²⁸ The two-story granite base is articulated with ornament of the Doric order. The projecting entrance portico is flanked by fluted columns supporting an entablature composed of a narrow, plain architrave, a frieze of alternating triglyphs and metopes, and a molded cornice with modillions. This entablature extends the width of the building and separates the base from the building’s four-story limestone mid section. The middle stories are minimally decorated with simple projecting window sills and quoins at the building’s corners, and are capped by a molded stone beltcourse. The two-story limestone capital at the top of the building is distinguished by an arcade of six Ionic columns, a series of unornamented cartouches, and a deeply projecting modillioned cornice.

Symbolizing the structure’s role as the headquarters of a gas company, much of the applied ornament on the Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building incorporates devices associated with flames and illumination.²⁹ The spandrel panels of the bronze window enframements on the lower stories are decorated with a series of panels depicting torches, oil lamps, and crests consisting of a shield emblazoned with a fleur-de-lis set in front of a torch and an axe. Similar ornamentation can also be found in the metopes in the entablature above the entrance portico and on the spandrel panel of the original bronze entrance enframement recessed within the portico behind a later set of entrance doors.

Subsequent History of the Building

The Brooklyn Union Gas Company occupied its new headquarters on Remsen Street for nearly half a century. During their tenure in the building the firm continued to grow steadily, increasing its production facilities, finding new markets, and expanding its service area. In 1928 a massive new gas manufacturing plant was opened on the Newton Creek in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Two decades later the company helped finance the transcontinental pipeline that brought natural gas directly to the city from Texas and the south. The new product proved to be cheap and popular, and by 1952 Brooklyn Union had ceased its gas manufacturing operations completely.³⁰ In the late 1950s Brooklyn Union pushed into new territory across Greater New York City, securing footholds in the Bay Ridge and Coney Island neighborhoods in Brooklyn as well as on Staten Island.³¹ With the growth of the company, Brooklyn Union again needed to expand its offices and in 1962 it opened a new headquarters at 195 Montague Street. The firm later merged with the Long Island Lighting Company and several smaller utilities to form KeySpan Corporation in 1998, which in turn was acquired by National Grid USA in 2007.

The former headquarters building at 186 Remsen Street was sold in 1962 to St. Francis College and converted into an academic facility. Alterations to the exterior of the building have been minimal; most notable was the installation of a second entrance enframement and doors—including an abstracted wire sculpture of a Franciscan Brother—set in front of the original entrance recessed within the vestibule.

Description

Historic: Eight-story neo-Classical-style building with one primary designed facade facing Remsen Street; facade has a tripartite composition with a two-story base, four-story shaft, and two-story capital. *Base*: Clad in granite; divided into five bays; main entrance in center bay; projecting entrance portico supported by fluted columns; upper half of original bronze entrance enframement, including decorative spandrel panels as well as original pendant light fixture with

glass globe, remains intact behind current entrance enframing; original bronze display window infill, including decorative spandrel panels, in flanking bays; bronze mounting plates for light fixtures (installed sometime between 1914 and 1940) located on piers between ground-floor display windows; a projecting, modillioned cornice separates the base from the building's shaft. *Shaft*: Clad in limestone; divided into eleven bays of window openings, outside bays grouped into pairs of windows, remaining bays arranged regularly across facade; historic window frames with replacement sash retaining original one-over-one configuration; quoins along building corners; molded cornice separates shaft from capital. *Capital*: Clad in limestone; divided into eleven bays of window openings; outside bays grouped into pairs of windows flanked by heavy pilasters; remaining bays arranged regularly across facade and separated by engaged columns; incised spandrel panels; transoms above eighth story window openings; modillioned cornice; parapet above cornice. *Side walls*: Portions of both side walls visible above adjacent buildings; plain buff brick with limestone of main facade returning around the building's corners as quoins.

Alterations: Lower half of original bronze entrance enframing and doors replaced with anodized aluminum; additional anodized aluminum entrance enframing installed in front of recessed entrance vestibule; historic double-globe light fixtures removed from piers between display windows; replacement sash installed in historic window frames; two flag poles installed on top of entrance portico and another installed on building facade above portico; portion of original areaway railing removed from left of building, new deck and railing installed above sunken areaway; metal gates installed in front of both stairs leading to sunken areaway.

Site: Historic standpipes installed in sidewalk on both sides of entrance portico; sunken areaway on both sides of entrance, each with a stair leading to the basement level; areaways enclosed by cast-iron railing.

Sources: Several exterior photographs published in "New General Office Building for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company," *Architecture and Building* 46, August 1914; exterior photograph by Wurts Bros., "176 Remsen Street, Brooklyn Union Gas Co." (1917), from the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York, available online under image number X2010.7.1.2234.

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NOTES

¹ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Clay Lancaster, *Old Brooklyn Heights: New York's First Suburb* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979); Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *DUMBO Historic District Designation Report* (LP-2279) (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart; LPC, *Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1952) (New York: City of New York, 1997), prepared by Donald G. Presa; Brian Merlis and Lee A. Rosenzweig, *Brooklyn Heights and Downtown: Volume 1, 1860 to 1922* (Brooklyn: Israelowitz Publishing, 2001); Francis Morrone, *An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2001); New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Municipal Arts Society of New York, and the Brooklyn Heights Association, "A Proposal for Creation of the Borough Hall

Skyscraper Historic District,” January 9, 2006; New York Supreme Court, *Report of Cases Adjudged and Determined in the Supreme County of Judicature and Court for the Trial of Impeachments and Corrections of Errors of the State of New York* (New York: The Lawyers’ Co-operative Publishing Co., 1884); Ellen M. Snyder-Grenier, *Brooklyn!: An Illustrated History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Henry R. Stiles, *History of the City of Brooklyn, Including the Old Town and Village of Brooklyn, the Town of Bushwick, and the Village and City of Williamsburgh* 1-3 (Brooklyn: Published by Subscription, 1867-70); Stiles, ed., *History of Kings County Including the City of Brooklyn* 1-2 (Brooklyn: W. W. Munsell & Co., 1884); Ralph Foster Weld, *Brooklyn Village, 1816-1834* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).; William Lee Younger, *Old Brooklyn in Early Photographs, 1865-1929* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978).

² During the 1820s residential buildings were being erected in significant numbers on both sides of the ferry landing as street openings and other civic improvement projects transformed the old country estates into a viable urban neighborhood. A map of the village published in 1827 shows the extent of urban development stretching over much of the northern section of Brooklyn Heights, as well as many of the blocks to the east of Fulton Street laid out by the Sands brothers. *Hooker’s New Pocket Plan of the Village of Brooklyn* (Brooklyn: William Hooker, 1827).

³ The original plans for Brooklyn City Hall were drawn by Calvin Pollard. A description can be found in Stiles (1884), 534-35.

⁴ One of the most notable of the Montague Street bank buildings was the Brooklyn Trust Company Building (1913-16, York and Sawyer) at 177-179 Montague Street, which has been designated a New York City Individual and Interior Landmark.

⁵ Information in this section is based on the following sources: “A Gas Trust for Brooklyn,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 24, 1894; “Brooklyn Gas Works,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 27, 1849, 2; “History of Brooklyn Union, 1825-1963,” *Management Newsletter*, undated article in the LPC research file; *International Directory of Company Histories* 6 (Chicago: St. James Press, 1992); LPC, *Consolidated Edison Building Designation Report* (LP-2313) (New York: City of New York, 2009), prepared by Gale Harris; *Laws of the State of New-York, Passed at the Forty-Eighth Session of the Legislature* (Albany, NY: E. Crosswell, 1825); Stiles (1867-70); Stiles (1884); “The Latest Gas War,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 8, 1883, 4.

⁶ Throughout much of the 19th century gas was manufactured by heating coal in an oxygen-free vessel called a retort. Many of the retorts used by the Brooklyn Gas Light Company were produced by the Brooklyn Clay Retort and Fire Brick Works, whose storehouse still stands in the Red Hook neighborhood at 76-86 Van Dyke Street (built c. 1859, a designated New York City Landmark). After heating, the resulting gasses were then purified to remove coal tar and other wastes and sent to large cylindrical tanks known as gas holders. The by-products of this process were highly toxic and several of the manufactured gas plant sites that once existed in Brooklyn have recently been targeted for environmental remediation by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. See New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Environmental Remediation, “New York State’s Approach to the Remediation of Former Manufactured Gas Plant Sites,” (available online: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8430.html>, accessed January 2011).

⁷ Stiles (1867-70), 220-222.

⁸ *Laws of the State of New-York*, 304.

⁹ According to Stiles, the firm was apparently acquired in 1847 by “some enterprising gentlemen from Philadelphia” who were largely responsible for its revival. Stiles (1867-70), 823-824; “Brooklyn Gas Works.”

¹⁰ The Citizens’, People’s, and Nassau firms purchased their territory directly from the Brooklyn Gas Light Company, while the Metropolitan acquired its service area from Citizens’. See “Tumbling: Decline in the Price of Gas Stock in Brooklyn,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, January 26, 1882, 4; Stiles (1884), 675-676.

¹¹ The Town of Williamsburgh became the City of Williamsburgh in 1852; it was later annexed into Brooklyn, along with neighboring Bushwick, in 1855 (at which time it lost “h” at the end of its name, becoming the neighborhood of Williamsburg).

¹² The first to fall to the Fulton Municipal was the Citizens’, then the Metropolitan and People’s, then Brooklyn. See “A Gas War in Brooklyn,” *New-York Tribune*, July 7, 1883, 8.

¹³ The gas companies of Manhattan had already merged to form the Consolidated Gas Company (later renamed the Consolidated Edison Company) in 1884.

¹⁴ “History of Brooklyn Union.”

¹⁵ Industrial clients in particular became increasingly important to Brooklyn Union as the borough grew into one of the most important manufacturing centers in the country.

¹⁶ An article on the new headquarters notes, “the purpose of erecting the building was to concentrate under one roof, for better co-ordination and greater economy in the service, the departments formerly scattered over Brooklyn.” “New General Office Building for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company,” *Architecture and Building* 46 (August 1914), 304.

¹⁷ Information in this section is based on the following sources: *1871 Census of Canada*, Province of Ontario, District of South Wentworth, Sub-district of Barton, 67-68; *1881 Census of Canada*, Province of Ontario, District of South Wentworth, Sub-district of Barton, 59; *1900 United States Federal Census*, State of New York, Kings County, Ward 7, Enumeration District 78, 19; *1910 United States Federal Census*, State of New York, Kings County, Ward 7, Enumeration District 90, 4A; *1920 United States Federal Census*, State of New York, Kings County, Brooklyn Assembly District 11, Enumeration District 612, 1B; Edward Marion Chadwick, *Ontarian Families: Genealogies of United-Empire-Loyalists and Other Pioneer Families of Upper Canada*” vol. 1 (Toronto, Canada: Rolph, Smith & Co., 1895); Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1840-1900* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979); Christopher Gray, “Streetscapes: Frank Freeman, Architect; After a Century, a Fond Remembrance,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1995; Adriana R. Kleiman Research Papers on Frank Freeman, Department of Drawings & Archives, Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York, NY; LPC, *Fulton Ferry Historic District Designation Report* (LP-0956) (New York: City of New York, 1977); Morrone; Obituary, *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 14, 1949, 13; Obituary, *New York Times*, October 14, 1949; *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp); Cervin Robinson, “Bravura in Brooklyn,” *Architectural Forum* 131 (November 1969), 42-47; James Ward, *Architects in Practice New York City, 1900-1940* (Union, NJ: J & D Associates, 1989).

¹⁸ Most sources list Freeman’s birth year as 1861, although Chadwick’s genealogy claims a date of March 16, 1860. Chadwick, 146.

¹⁹ The location of the family estate is still marked by a short street in Hamilton named Freeman Place.

²⁰ See Robinson, 42, as well as the attribution of Emmanuel Baptist Church to Freeman in his obituary in the *Brooklyn Eagle*.

²¹ Francis, 32.

²² LPC, *Greenwich Village Historic District Extension Designation Report* (LP-2184) (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Jay Shockley, 35; *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 41 (1888), 303, 397, 825.

²³ While a brief listing of the project in the *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* notes that the plans were filed by the partnership of O’Connor & Freeman, all subsequent references to the building cite Freeman alone as its architect. *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 41 (1888), 852.

²⁴ During this productive period Freeman also was married to Katharine E. Caldwell in 1888 and was involved in the creation of the Architecture Department of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences in 1889.

²⁵ The Bushwick Democratic Club was designated a New York City Landmark and the Hotel Margaret was designated within the Brooklyn Heights Historic District; both were subsequently destroyed by fire.

²⁶ A rendering of the Dobbs Ferry house appears in an issue of *American Architect and Building News* but it is unclear if it was ever built. “Residence at Dobbs Ferry on the Hudson,” *American Architect and Building News* 31 (March 21, 1891), 193-194.

²⁷ Information in this section is based on the following sources: Francis D.K. Ching, *A Visual Dictionary of Architecture* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1995); Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999); LPC, *Consolidated Edison Building Designation Report*; “New General Office Building for the Brooklyn

Union Gas Company”; Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History* (Boulder, CO: Icon Editions/Westview Press, 2001).

²⁸ “New General Office Building,” 299.

²⁹ Many gas and electric companies incorporated similar symbolic ornamentation on their headquarters buildings. The Consolidated Edison Building in Manhattan (1910-11 and 1912-14, Henry Hardenbergh, with later additions in 1926-28 and 1928-29 by Warren & Wetmore, a designated New York City Landmark) has an extensive decorative scheme developed around torches, lamps, urns, flames, and lightning bolts; the Baltimore Gas and Electric Company Building in Baltimore, Maryland (1916, Parker, Thomas and Rice) has a series of large sculptures above the fourth floor representing light, heat, and power.

³⁰ *Management Newsletter*.

³¹ Brooklyn Union purchased the New York and Richmond Gas Company, serving Staten Island, and the Kings County Lighting Company, covering Bay Ridge, in 1957. Two years later in 1959 it acquired the Brooklyn Borough Gas Company in Coney Island.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the buildings and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Brooklyn Union Gas Company 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, among its important qualities, the Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building was constructed in 1914 as the new headquarters for the borough's oldest and most important utility company and that it was designed by noted architect Frank Freeman; that Downtown Brooklyn first developed as a commercial center during the second half of the 19th century and that it continued to grow following the consolidation of Greater New York in 1898 so that the area was redeveloped in the early 20th century with larger office buildings, including the eight-story structure erected for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company at 176 Remsen Street; that the Brooklyn Union Gas Company played an important role in the history of Brooklyn, tracing its origins to the founding of the Brooklyn Gas Light Company in 1824 and winning its first major contract in 1849 to provide street illumination for the growing city; that the Brooklyn Gas Light Company and the other predecessor firms to the Brooklyn Union continued to play an important role in the development of Brooklyn throughout the 19th century, serving newly-urbanized neighborhoods such as Cobble Hill, Fort Greene, and Park Slope; that the predecessor firms combined to form the Brooklyn Union Gas Company in 1895 and that this company continued to expand into the 20th century by creating new markets for its product, and that this growth helped prompt the company to begin planning for a new headquarters in 1912 and to inaugurate the building in 1914; that Frank Freeman, the architect of the building, was one of the most successful Brooklyn architects of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, widely known for his muscular Richardsonian Romanesque Revival building but also an able designer of a wide range of building types and architectural styles; that Freeman's design for the Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building employs the Classically-inspired architectural vocabulary that characterized much of Freeman's post-Columbian Exposition commissions, including the use of Doric-order ornament on the granite-clad two-story base, which incorporates a projecting entrance portico flanked by fluted columns and capped with an entablature decorated with triglyphs and metopes; that Freeman's decorative scheme for the building is also symbolic of the structure's original role as the headquarters of an important gas company, depicting such devices as flaming torches and blazing oil lamps; that the Brooklyn Union Gas Company continued to occupy the building until 1962, when it was sold to St. Francis College and converted into an academic facility, and that the building has undergone very few exterior alterations since its completion in 1914.

Accordingly, pursuant to 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 Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building, and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 255, Lot 36 in part, consisting of the property bounded by a line beginning at a point on the southern side of Remsen Street distant 200 feet westerly from the corner formed by the intersection of the southern side of Remsen Street and the western side of Court Street, continuing southerly and

parallel to the western side of Court Street 100 feet, westerly and parallel to the southern side of Remsen Street 98 feet, northerly and parallel to the western side of Court Street 100 feet to the southern side of Remsen Street, easterly along the southern side of Remsen Street 98 feet to the point of the beginning, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair

Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Michael Devonshire, Joan Gerner, Michael Goldblum, Margery Perlmutter, Commissioners



Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building
176 Remsen Street (aka 172-178 Remsen Street)
Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 255, Lot 36 in part
Built: 1914
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2009)



Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building
Photo: New York City Department of Taxes (c. 1939)
Courtesy New York City Municipal Archives



Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building
Entrance portico
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2011)



Brooklyn Union Gas Company Building
Bronze window panels of main story
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee (2011)

[MAP PLACEHOLDER]