



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

330 West 42nd Street, 26th floor New York, NY 10036
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512
www.ManhattanCB4.org

JOHN WEIS
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

Hon. Robert B. Tierney
Chair
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Municipal Building, ninth floor
One Center Street,
New York, NY 10007

Re: B. F. Goodrich Buildings at 1780 Broadway and 225 West 57th Street

Dear Chair Tierney:

Manhattan Community Board 4 is writing in support of the position of Community Board 5 in favor of the designation as individual landmarks of the pair of B. F. Goodrich Buildings flanking the northeast corner of Broadway and West 57th Street. The buildings form a significant part of the Columbus Circle district that was the center of the old Automobile Row that stretched along Broadway from near Times Square almost to 72nd Street in the first decades of the 20th Century.

Community Board 4 has long worked with its neighbor boards in the area of Columbus Circle, especially in the years around the turn of the millennium when Boards 4, 5 and 7 joined in a task force to deal with the replacement of the old Convention Center at 10 Columbus Circle by the Time Warner Center as well as the reconstruction of the Circle itself and the subway station beneath. The major intersection of Broadway and 57th Street is an important part of the environment of the Circle, and the buildings that flank its northeast corner at 1780 Broadway and 225 West 57th Street form a significant part of the view from the western sidewalk of Eighth Avenue within Community District 4 at the intersection with 57th Street and just south of it.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission has already designated a number of handsome historic buildings along West 57th Street and Broadway nearby, most of them closely connected with the once famous Automobile Row of the early 20th Century. Designation of the two linked B. F. Goodrich buildings would be an important step towards creating a major permanent presence in this area that would preserve and celebrate the fine buildings created at this major moment of Broadway's history.

The B.F. Goodrich Company of Akron, Ohio, which had become one of the leading manufacturers of rubber tires, decided in 1908 to create new headquarters in New York, purchased the site of the present buildings, and efficiently completed both by the fall of 1909. The principal architect of the buildings was Howard Van Doren Shaw, a prominent

Chicago School architect who had previously done work for the company and its executives. His work is almost exclusively found in the Midwest and is dominantly residential. It shows a distinctive sensibility, influenced by the Beaux-Arts Classical styles of the World's Columbian Exposition indeed, but also by Jacobean England together with the more recent Arts and Crafts Movement and by such Central European movements as the Jugendstil and Secessionism. These influences, which contributed to some strains of Modernism, clearly influenced features of the two New York buildings, which are Shaw's only known work in New York City.

The two buildings were linked by a large freight elevator, which was located at the corner of the two buildings, opened on every floor of both buildings, and with its turntable floor could carry automobiles to wide hallways leading to showrooms as well as more common loads. The shared street entrance to the elevator was on 57th Street, and the basement and heating system, with a boiler located in 257 West 57th St., were also shared. Interestingly, simultaneously with construction on these buildings, the Peerless Motor Car Company was erecting a L-shaped building across 57th Street just to the south.

The two Goodrich Buildings were clad in red brick with limestone trim and with ornament of light stone and terra cotta, which gave them a unified effect among surroundings in which most important buildings were dominantly clad in limestone--the old General Motors Building across Broadway was yet to come. Both showed related tripartite designs with ornamented double-height bases, somewhat plainer middle sections with deep-set window bays, and ornamented tops. The ground floors of both had entrances on the sides while the center was filled with large display windows. Both second floors were more lavishly ornamented in the distinctive styles favored by Shaw. The plainer, windowed central sections of both buildings were terminated by projecting balconies, fully or partially of metal, below elaborate tops with parapets.

Some of these features, especially at the ground floors, have been altered or replaced over time, but most of the elaborate, idiosyncratic ornament that was commented on at the time remains to reflect Shaw's distinctive variations on classical design that were called out for praise in reports of the time.. Particularly interesting on 225 W. 57th are the ornamental forms of the central section recalling the lug nuts used to fasten wheels to automobiles, as well as the terra-cotta plant reliefs, and, between the seventh and eighth floors, the capital letter G's under cornucopias claiming the building for the B. F. Goodrich Company.

Although 1780 Broadway was designed to be New York headquarters for the New York B. F. Goodrich Company, over time it became more of a branch. The building continued to house Goodrich showrooms, sales, and automobile tire repair, but other automobile-associated tenants took more of the space. The Atlantic Motor Company, which distributed Stoddard Dayton Cars, was a longtime tenant. From the beginning 225 West 57th St. housed such tenants as the Atlantic Motor Company, the Dayton Demountable Rim Company, the Stewart Auto Company along with its Auto School, and an association of motor manufacturers. As Automobile Row dwindled both auto offices and

auto storage seem to have continued for some time, but other uses, most notably the WPA Federal Art Project Gallery, gradually took over.

Community Board 4 believes it is strongly desirable to save both members of this interesting pair of buildings designed by this idiosyncratic Chicago School architect, and which form an important part of the old Automobile Row. We believe the city will in the long run gain more from designation and reuse of the 225 West 57th Street building than from demolition of the building in order to expand an already large building site on the east to which the unused development rights might easily be transferred instead. We join Board 5 in supporting designation of both 1780 Broadway and 225 West 57th Street as New York City landmarks.

Sincerely,



John Weiss
Chair
Manhattan Community
Board 4



Edward S. Kirkland
Co-Chair
Landmarks Committee



John D. Lamb
Co-Chair
Landmarks Committee

Cc. Community Board 5
Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Council Member Melinda Katz
Council Member Jessica Lappin
Council Member Daniel Garodnick
State Senator Thomas Duane
Assembly member Richard Gottfried