

**GUARDIAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY OF AMERICA ANNEX, 105 EAST 17TH STREET,** (aka 105–117 East 17<sup>th</sup> Street and 108–116 East 18<sup>th</sup> Street), Manhattan. Built 1959–63; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects; Roger Radford, designer.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 873, Lot 10.

On April 10, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the former Guardian Life Insurance Company of America Annex and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 13). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with provisions of law. Eleven people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of State Senator Tom Duane, Community Board No. 5, DoCoMoMO, Gramercy Park Neighbors, Historic District Council, Modern Architecture Working Group, Municipal Art Society, and Union Square Community Coalition. A representative of the owner expressed no opposition to designation. The Commission has also received numerous letters in support of designation.



### Summary

The Guardian Life Insurance Company Annex is a rare example of a low-rise office building in Manhattan shaped by the aesthetics of 20<sup>th</sup> Century European Modernism, frequently called the International Style. Four stories tall, it was designed in the New York City office of the architects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and features a crisp curtain wall of anodized aluminum spandrel panels and tinted glass. Work on the project began in 1959 and construction was completed in 1963. Though Guardian Life contemplated moving during the 1950s, objections from community groups in Westchester County and staff persuaded the company to remain in Manhattan and erect an annex of substantial dimensions directly east of the company's 1911 neo-classical-style headquarters. A large through-block site was quietly assembled, bounded by East 17<sup>th</sup> Street and East 18<sup>th</sup> Street, one that would spread operations across a minimum number of floors. SOM partners, Robert W. Cutler and Roy O. Allen, supervised the project, while an associate partner, Roger Radford, is credited with producing the building's understated and yet elegant design. Aluminum was frequently used by SOM designers in the late 1950s and 1960s to create stylish exterior wall systems. This approach loosely reflects the rational building techniques promoted by the German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who sought to reduce building elevations to non-load-bearing skins of standardized metal and glass components. A certain model for the Guardian Life Annex was the recently-completed Pepsi-Cola Building. Not only did both SOM commissions display remarkably similar curtain walls but several members of the firm, architects Robert Cutler, Herman E. Borst, and Albert Kennerly, were involved in both projects. When the building was completed in 1963, much of Guardian Life's staff moved into the Annex and the tower was renovated for use by outside tenants. Guardian Life moved to Hanover Square, near Water Street, in lower Manhattan in 1999 and these structures were sold to the Related Companies, a real estate developer. Despite modifications to the main entrance facing East 17<sup>th</sup> Street, both facades are well preserved and reflect the architect's original design.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Guardian Life Insurance Company of America

In May 1860 a group of mainly German immigrants gathered at Delmonico's restaurant to discuss the formation of a company that would become known as the Germania Life Insurance Company of New York. Hugo Wesendonk, who fled Germany following the "March Revolution" of 1848, was named the company's first president, serving until 1897. At the time, there were ten life insurance companies operating in New York City, offering policies to protect individuals from financial loss in the event of death.<sup>1</sup> Though various kinds of insurance had existed since antiquity, it was not until the late 1600s that businesses in London began to develop ways to protect owners from risk. Using mortality tables, these "modern" insurance companies sold policies that based premiums on age. In the United States, the earliest firm was founded in the 1730s – a fire insurer in Charleston, South Carolina. Following the American Revolution, companies were established in New York City, including the New York Insurance Company in 1796. The number of local firms selling policies increased dramatically following the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, resulting in both increased regulation and specialization. Germania Life was (and remains) a mutual life insurance company, meaning that policy holders elect company officials and share in profits.

Many life insurers struggled financially after the Civil War, with twenty-two firms in New York State declaring bankruptcy between 1867 and 1873. Germania Life, however, prospered, expanding into new markets, with agents in the Caribbean, Central America, and Germany. This proved to be a hugely successful strategy and the Berlin office was responsible for a quarter of all sales. World War I, however, had a detrimental effect on American attitudes toward businesses with German associations and in 1917 the company was renamed the Guardian Life Insurance Company of New York.<sup>2</sup>

### Guardian Life and Union Square

Germania Life was based in the financial district until 1911; first leasing offices in a succession of buildings, and later, purchasing 20 Nassau Street (c. 1850s, demolished). Located at the corner of Cedar Street, beside the Equitable Life Assurance Company, the building was a four-story Italianate structure that the company reportedly remodeled by 1876, adding a substantial mansard roof.<sup>3</sup>

To coincide with the firm's semi-centennial in 1910, Guardian Life acquired a site at the northeast corner of Union Square, fronting Fourth Avenue and East 17<sup>th</sup> Street, between the neighborhoods called Union Square and Gramercy Park. Identified as both 201 Park Avenue South and 50 Union Square East, the land was purchased under Cornelius Doremus, the company's second president. Completed in 1911, the neo-French Renaissance style headquarters was designed by architect Frederick D'Oench (& Joseph Warren Yost), who served on the company's Board of Directors. Like the Nassau Street home office, it was capped by a prominent mansard roof.<sup>4</sup> Twenty stories tall, the Germania Life Building was one in a small group of early steel-framed skyscrapers to rise in the area during the first decade of the twentieth century, including the Bank of the Metropolis (Bruce Price, 1902–3, a designated New York City Landmark), the headquarters of the Consolidated Gas Company, (Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1910–14), now the Con Edison Building, and various store and loft buildings along Fourth Avenue, now called Park Avenue South. To take full advantage of the site's visibility from Union Square, as well as from the approaching streets, a large electric sign advertising the company's name was installed atop the mansard roof – one of the first of its kind in New York City.

Guardian Life continued to prosper and expand after the Second World War. Eighteen life insurance companies were based in New York City by 1953, with policies valued at \$90,000 million.<sup>5</sup> Licensed to operate in all fifty states, Guardian entered the lucrative field of group insurance in 1957 and by 1960 had almost two billion dollars in assets. With more than four hundred employees on fourteen floors, the "home office" grew seriously overcrowded. Beginning in the 1930s, many prominent companies, including Reader's Digest, International Business Machines, and Bell Telephone Laboratories, moved to suburbia, erecting glamorous facilities in New Jersey, Westchester and Nassau counties. According to documents at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (hereafter, SOM), Guardian began to

first contemplate moving to Westchester around 1950.<sup>6</sup> At the time, it had approximately 500 employees in Manhattan and business was said to be “conducted entirely by mail.” A nine-acre site in White Plains was selected and a \$4.5 million campus was proposed for an estimated 1,100 employees, with 18.5% site coverage. Staff and local residents, however, opposed the plan and in June 1956 it was rejected by the New York State Superintendent of Insurance on the grounds that it might interfere with customer service.<sup>7</sup> A new site in New Rochelle was then proposed as an alternative and SOM developed a new design but after experiencing similar opposition from area residents, Guardian officials announced in July 1957 that it would not exercise its option to purchase the site and would remain in New York City.<sup>8</sup>

A remarkable number of office towers were constructed in Manhattan during the 1950s and 1960s, with the largest group concentrated in midtown, between 40<sup>th</sup> and 57<sup>th</sup> Streets. Though Guardian Life considered erecting an entirely new structure “uptown,” it decided to remain on Union Square and construct a three-story addition, called the Annex.<sup>9</sup> John B. Fitzpatrick, an attorney for Braslin, Porter and Wheelock, was hired to quietly assemble the adjoining L-shaped site and by October 1958 Guardian took ownership of the eleven lots. Along East 17<sup>th</sup> Street, the five lots extended 175 feet, and on East 18<sup>th</sup> Street, 150 feet. These parcels were occupied by nineteenth-century brick and brownstone dwellings that had been converted to apartment buildings. All were demolished to prepare the site for construction. In April 1959, the *New York Times* reported that a 75,000 square foot addition – nearly the same size as the structure that Guardian had proposed for New Rochelle – was planned, to be designed by SOM.<sup>10</sup>

#### Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Architects

Many prominent American corporations commissioned buildings from SOM after the Second World War. Founded in Chicago in 1930, the firm first established a New York City office in 1937. In subsequent decades, it became one of the world’s leading architectural firms, frequently practicing an approach to design that reflected the influence of 20<sup>th</sup>-century European Modernism, and in particular, the minimalist designs of former Bauhaus director Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who immigrated to the United States in the late 1930s and lived in Chicago. At the New York World’s Fair of 1939-40, SOM produced several striking corporate pavilions, including structures for Swift & Company, the Continental Baking Company, and the Agfa Ansco Corporation. The firm developed a wide and varied clientele, ranging from the United States government to major banks, manufacturers, and several leading insurance companies. In 1947, New York Life Insurance commissioned both Mayer & Whittlesey and SOM to build Manhattan House (a designated New York City Landmark), a sleek 580-unit white brick rental apartment building on the Upper East Side. Shortly after, in 1949, the Chicago office began work on Lake Meadows, a 1,400 unit apartment complex owned by New York Life on Chicago’s south side. SOM later built the suburban headquarters of the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company (1955-57), near Hartford. Completed two years before filing plans for the Guardian Life Annex, these office structures share similar characteristics, including a low-rise horizontal plan and innovative metal-and-glass curtain walls, as well as clients from the same industry.

In terms of organization, the Guardian Life project was managed by two partners at SOM, one who was responsible for administration and the other for design. Robert W(ard) Cutler (1905-93) was the administrative partner and signed most filings with the Department of Buildings. A graduate of Syracuse University (Bachelor of Architecture) in 1928, he joined SOM as an associate in 1937 and became a partner in 1949. During his forty-year career with the firm, he specialized in corporate and health facilities. Cutler was known as a “gregarious man who could handle even the most difficult of clients.”<sup>11</sup> He worked on many local projects and collaborated with Bunshaft on construction of the New York University Medical Center (1950s) along First Avenue; the Muscular Dystrophy Unit at the Institute for Muscle Disease (1957-59) at 515 East 71<sup>st</sup> Street; the Pepsi-Cola Building (1958-60) on Park Avenue and 59<sup>th</sup> Street, and the Equitable Building (1959-61) on Sixth Avenue and 51<sup>st</sup> Street.

Roy O. Allen (d. 1992) was the design partner. A graduate of Pennsylvania State University, he joined SOM in the late 1940s. He served in this position from 1960 to 1980 and designed One Liberty Plaza (1973), at 165 Broadway in Manhattan. Allen assigned the Guardian Life project to Roger Radford,

who recalled in 2008: “I was an associate partner and project designer and in fact Roy left the design to me. So I can be credited with the design.”<sup>12</sup>

Radford’s role has also been confirmed by Herman E. Borst, an architect in the construction department, who prepared the working drawings and claimed to have “detailed it.”<sup>13</sup> Albert Kennerly, an associate partner, probably acted as project manager and represented SOM at preliminary meetings with Guardian Life executives. A 1939 graduate of the Columbia School of Architecture, he worked on the Pepsi-Cola Building, with Cutler, as well as the circular-plan Macy’s Department Store (1960s) in Elmhurst, Queens.<sup>14</sup> Herbert D. Warrington was the project’s job captain.

### Design and Construction

SOM filed plans with the Department of Buildings in July 1959. Measuring 159 feet (17<sup>th</sup> Street) by 183 feet (north-south) by 124 feet (18<sup>th</sup> Street), the estimated budget for construction of the 77,000 square foot structure was \$2 million. The application (NB 154-59), however, was continuously amended and would not be approved until April 1962. The Annex is built of reinforced concrete, including the piers and floor slabs. Not only did the DOB require the architects to carry out multiple compression and load tests, but questions about the concrete structure’s potential use as a place of assembly further delayed progress. Despite delays, the ground breaking took place in July 1960, with various Guardian Life executives in attendance. John Lowry, Inc. served as the contractor, Syska & Hennessey, Inc. as the mechanical engineer, and Weiskopf & Pickworth as the structural engineer. The building received a temporary certificate of occupancy in February 1962 and a permanent one was granted in April 1963.

In contrast to most office buildings constructed in Manhattan after World War II, the Guardian Life Annex is a low-rise infill structure. Only four stories tall, it has an almost suburban feel, comparable to the horizontal campus SOM built for the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company in 1957. More likely, though, it was inspired the firm’s unrealized proposal for Guardian Life in New Rochelle (1956) or Alumni Hall, part of the New York University Medical Center. Radford developed several schemes for the Annex, differentiated only by the number of floors. All but the first (ground) floor were planned with connecting passages to the adjoining Guardian Life tower, including the “main” floor, which is located slightly below grade. In this arrangement, stairs connect the tower’s first story to both the first and main floors in the Annex. The *New York Times* compared the plan to the layout in a “split level house.”<sup>15</sup> The mezzanine level connects directly to the tower’s second floor, and the second floor in the Annex connects to the tower’s third story. As completed, the Annex not only respects the residential scale of the Gramercy Park neighborhood but due to the size of the site it also has unusually large floor plates, approximately four times the size of floors in the tower. Radford recalled: “The owner’s requirement was simple – to provide full floor open office space.”<sup>16</sup> This spacious arrangement not only met the needs of individual departments and future growth, but it allowed interrelated departments to operate side by side.<sup>17</sup>

The Annex extends along East 17<sup>th</sup> Street and East 18<sup>th</sup> Street. Clad with rectangular aluminum panels, both facades are nearly identical. SOM frequently used this material in the late 1950s and early 1960s and Cutler prepared an enthusiastic lecture on the topic in 1957. Radford later explained:

Because it is sited between the Guardian tower and an adjacent building to the east the essential elements of the design are the crisp curtain walls on the north and south. These provided maximum daylight for office space. Developing curtain wall systems was an ongoing specialty of SOM.<sup>18</sup>

Structures designed by SOM in the metropolitan area that made prominent use of aluminum include: the dome housing the reactor at Industrial Reactor Labs (1958) in Plainsboro, New Jersey, substantial portions of the United Airlines Building at Kennedy Airport (1958), and One Chase Manhattan Plaza (1956–60) in Lower Manhattan. Bunshaft and Radford also designed the headquarters of the Reynolds Metals Company (now part of ALCOA), in Richmond Virginia. Constructed in 1955–58, this low-rise campus demonstrated various ways that aluminum could be incorporated into contemporary architecture, even the carpets, which were woven with aluminum fibers.

Strong, durable, light in weight, and resistant to corrosion, aluminum can be used in a wide variety of applications, in prefabricated window sash and mullions, as well as in panels systems that could be installed with a minimum of scaffolding.<sup>19</sup> Techniques to extract aluminum cheaply date to the end of the nineteenth century, but it wasn't until the late 1920s that it began to gain popularity, in the manufacture of consumer products and the design of building ornament. Several Art Deco landmarks in Manhattan prominently display aluminum elements, such as the Chrysler Building (1930), the Empire State Building (1931), and various structures at Rockefeller Center (begun 1931). During the same year, the Aluminaire House (Kocher & Frey, 1930-31), a full-scale model home, was exhibited as part of the Allied Arts and Building Products Exposition at the Grand Central Palace. Built with aluminum columns and aluminum walls, as well as steel beams and girders, this early modernist structure was featured in the Museum of Modern Art's first architectural exhibition, which helped introduce the so-called "International Style" in the United States.<sup>20</sup>

Major manufacturers of aluminum – ALCOA, Reynolds Metals Company, and Kaiser Aluminum – who greatly expanded production during the Second World War, in subsequent years sought to increase commercial demand and associate their product with progress and modernity. When ALCOA commissioned a new headquarters in Pittsburgh, the entire structure was faced with aluminum. Wallace K. Harrison served as the architect and Oscar Nitzchke designed the faceted 6 by 12 foot panels. Completed in 1953, *Architectural Forum* called it a "daring experiment . . . the beginning of true industrial design in architecture."<sup>21</sup> In New York City, the earliest examples were designed by Emery Roth & Sons: the National Distiller's Building at 99 Park Avenue (1952–54), between East 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Streets, and the Davies Building at 450 Park Avenue (1953–54), at the northwest corner 57<sup>th</sup> Street. Lewis Mumford wrote that he feared the material might be overused and suggested that aluminum "can be welcomed only as an occasional note of contrast."<sup>22</sup> To avoid similar problems, the Administration and Technology Building (De Young, Moscovitz & Rosenberg, 1959) at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) was given an aluminum skin of unusual color, treated with blue tones and gold window frames.

At Guardian Life, SOM adopted a more understated aesthetic, enclosing the concrete structure with smooth spandrel panels that echo the shape of the rusticated limestone blocks that clad the base of the adjoining tower. Wider than tall, the horizontal orientation accentuates the building's low-rise character. Each aluminum panel has a matte finish and is flanked by thin projecting vertical mullions that rise from the base and end just below the roof line. Separating each bay, these evenly-spaced elements are the facade's only vertical accent and provide an interesting contrast to the opaque panels and reflective glass. There are four levels of plate glass windows, including the basement, which has visibly shorter panes. Tinted grey green, the windows extend from the floor to the ceiling. Taller than wide, they are fixed and cannot be opened. Fixed windows were common during this era, a time when energy costs were low and air conditioning was inexpensive. Below, the base is recessed and clad with black granite. At the east and west ends of the 18<sup>th</sup> Street facade, as well as the east end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Street facade, the facade is also recessed but clad entirely with black brick. These elements serve to isolate the Annex from neighboring buildings and enhance the seemingly weightless character of the curtain wall. In addition, they meet the need for secondary exits without interfering with simplicity of the primary mass. SOM adopted a similar strategy in the Pepsi-Cola Building (1958-60), a work that generated widespread critical acclaim. This was probably not a coincidence; in fact several members of the firm's Guardian Life team contributed to both projects – Cutler, Kennerly, and Borst.

### Subsequent History

Guardian Life began to move its staff into the Annex in February 1963. A company booklet enthusiastically reported: "We're Moving. That's Right! The Annex is ready and about two-thirds of us will start working there."<sup>23</sup> Arranged on four levels, the first floor was devoted to premium collection and tabulating, the mezzanine to group insurance and accounting, the second floor to health and life claims, as well as the employee lounge. The main floor, located slightly below grade, contained the mail and printing departments. All levels were linked by conveyor belts and three of the four levels were linked to the tower by connecting passages.

The relocation of approximately three hundred employees to the annex left considerable space in the tower vacant. In February 1964, Guardian Life placed an advertisement for “offices” in the *New York Times*. It described them as located in a “Beautifully modernized building. Central Air Conditioning, fluorescent lighting, under floor duct systems . . . Floors vary in size from 5,000 sq. ft. to 6,800 sq. feet.”<sup>24</sup> Clearly, the annex had advantageous layouts and until Guardian Life required additional office space the tower was more valuable to generate rental income.

In subsequent years, Guardian Life continued to expand. By 1992, it had \$8 billion in assets and 1,255 employees in four buildings near Union Square. In addition to the tower at 201 Park Avenue South, which became a designated New York City Landmark in 1988, office space was leased in Nos. 215, 225, and 233 Park Avenue South. Though a writer in the *New York Times* described the firm as being “Faithful to Union Square,” in August 1998 it announced plans to move its headquarters to 7 Hanover Square (Norman Jaffee, 1983), at Pearl and Water Streets.<sup>25</sup> At the time, the company had seventeen hundred employees based in Manhattan. Following the relocation in 1999, the tower and annex were acquired by the Related Companies. The landmark tower became a hotel in December 2001 and the Annex continues to be leased as offices. Despite modifications to the interiors, there have been few changes to the street elevations.

### Description

The former Guardian Life Insurance Company Annex, located mid-block between Park Avenue South and Irving Place, has two four-story street facades. The East 17<sup>th</sup> Street facade, between the former Guardian Life Insurance Company tower and a four-story residential building, contains nineteen bays. The East 18<sup>th</sup> Street facade, between 215 Park Avenue South and a brownstone-faced row house, contains twelve bays. Both facades are clad with aluminum spandrel panels, slender projecting aluminum mullions, and large, almost square, plate glass windows.

The west end of the East 17<sup>th</sup> Street (south) facade is recessed and incorporates a single bay of windows above a pair of non-historic, roll-down gates that serve the loading dock. There is a narrow recessed vertical slot between this bay and the main structure. The west wall of the main structure (within the recess) is faced with aluminum panels. They are aligned with the panels that run horizontally across the entire facade. A small, non-historic red sign is attached near the base. To the east, at ground level, are twin pairs of glass doors, sheltered by a projecting flat aluminum marquee, as well as, immediately left, a non-historic vertical sign for “Zurich.” The base is recessed and clad with black granite. Since the street slopes slightly, the height of the base rises from west to east. The facade is also recessed at the east end of the building, where it meets the adjoining row house. In the recess, the west wall has a chipped granite base and is painted black. This wall incorporates an emergency exit and no visible hardware. The first floor of the brick north wall is painted gray.

The East 18<sup>th</sup> Street (north) facade is almost identical to the East 17<sup>th</sup> Street facade. It is four stories tall and has a recessed black granite base that runs the full length of the facade. Both ends of the facade are similarly recessed and clad with painted black brick. At the west end, the wide recess incorporates three doors that are painted black. Each door has a non-historic red sign. An aluminum pipe fence is visible on the roof. The granite base has seams that are aligned with every second vertical mullion or I-beam. A double standpipe is visible close to the west end. At the east end of the East 18<sup>th</sup> Street facade, the recess incorporates a non-historic security camera above the emergency exit. This door has no visible hardware. Within the recess, the west surface is faced with aluminum panels. The seams between the panels are aligned with the top and bottom of each window along the main facade. The circular tree pits and black metal grates, in the adjoining sidewalk, are original.

Report researched and written by  
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## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Kenneth Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 673.
- <sup>2</sup> Other local examples include the Germania Savings Bank which became the Central Savings Bank.
- <sup>3</sup> Cited by Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, David Fishman in *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (Monacelli Press, 1999), 396, fn 25.
- <sup>4</sup> Landmarks Preservation Commission, “Germania Life Insurance Company Building Designation Report,” (LP-1541: New York, 1988), prepared by Lisa Koenigberg.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, 673.
- <sup>6</sup> SOM designed the Guardian Life office (1956) in San Diego, located at 2901 Fifth Avenue. See [www.modernSanDiego.com](http://www.modernSanDiego.com).
- <sup>7</sup> General Foods purchased a development site in White Plains in 1950 and construction began in 1953. See Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (Monacelli Press, 1997), 1072-73.
- <sup>8</sup> This section is based on unidentified clippings from such Westchester newspapers as the *Standard Star* found in the New York City archives of Skimore, Owings & Merrill, dating from the years 1956-60.
- <sup>9</sup> J. M. Kessler, *Guardian of the Century 1860-1960* (Guardian Life Insurance Company of America, 1960).
- <sup>10</sup> “Westchester Unit Rejects Park Loss,” *New York Times* (October 11, 1956), 41; “New Wing Slated by Guardian Life,” *New York Times* (April 16, 1959), 55; “Guardian Life Expands,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1960, 20.
- <sup>11</sup> Landmarks Preservation Commission, “Pepsi-Cola Building Designation Report,” (LP-1920: New York, 1995), prepared by David M. Breiner and Gale Harris.
- <sup>12</sup> Letter to author, 2008. Landmarks Preservation Commission files.
- <sup>13</sup> Phone conversation with author, 2008.
- <sup>14</sup> Kennerly left SOM in 1967 to join Fordyce & Hamby, architects.
- <sup>15</sup> “New Wing Slated for Guardian Life,” *New York Times* (April 16, 1959), 55.
- <sup>16</sup> Letter to author, 2008.
- <sup>17</sup> Despite such advantages, the annex was “designed for the addition of four more floors and a penthouse in the future when the company’s growth requires it.” See “We’re Moving,” brochure, not dated (probably early 1963), SOM Archives, New York.
- <sup>18</sup> Letter to author, 2008.
- <sup>19</sup> See Dennis Doordan, “From Precious to Pervasive: Art and Architecture” in *Aluminum by Design* (Harry N. Abrams, 2000).
- <sup>20</sup> Joseph Rose, “The Aluminaire House, 1930-31,” *Assemblage* (April 1990), 58-69.
- <sup>21</sup> Cited by Victoria Newhouse in *Wallace K. Harrison, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli Books, 1989), 147.
- <sup>22</sup> Stern, *New York 1960*, 301.
- <sup>23</sup> Brochure, SOM Archives, New York.
- <sup>24</sup> Advertisement, *New York Times* (February 16, 1964), R8.
- <sup>25</sup> “Faithful to Union Square,” *New York Times* (March 15, 1992), R1; “Guardian Life Moves Farther Downtown,” *New York Times* (August 20, 1998), B7.

## FINDINGS & 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 former Guardian Life Insurance Company of America Annex 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 Guardian Life Annex is a rare example of the low-rise building in Manhattan shaped by the aesthetics of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century European Modernism, often called the International Style; that it is an elegant piece of design, only four stories tall and faced with anodized aluminum panels and tinted glass; that it was built by Skidmore Owings & Merrill in 1959-63, with associate partner Roger Radford as designer; that it occupies a large site between East 17<sup>th</sup> Street and East 18<sup>th</sup> Street that originally adjoined the company's 1911 Union Square headquarters; that these modern architects were influenced by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and pioneered the use of similar curtain wall systems in such widely-praised commissions as the Pepsi-Cola Building at Park Avenue and 59<sup>th</sup> Street; that Guardian Life occupied the Annex until 1999; and that despite minor changes to the East 17<sup>th</sup> Street facade, both elevations are extremely well-preserved and reflect the architect's original intent.

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 former Guardian Life Insurance Company of America Annex, 105-117 East 17<sup>th</sup> Street and 108-116 East 18<sup>th</sup> Street, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Block 873, Lot 10, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Fred Bland, Stephen Byrns, Diana Chapin

Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners



**Guardian Life Insurance Company of America Annex**  
105-117 East 17<sup>th</sup> Street, 108-116 East 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan  
17<sup>th</sup> Street facade, looking east  
*Photos by Carl Forster*



17<sup>th</sup> Street facade, looking west



East 18<sup>th</sup> Street facade, looking west  
*Photos by Carl Forster*



East 18<sup>th</sup> Street facade, base, looking east



17<sup>th</sup> Street entrance, looking east  
*Photo by Carl Forster*



GUARDIAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY OF AMERICA ANNEX (LP-2247), 105 East 17th Street  
 (aka 105-117 East 17th Street; 108-116 East 18th Street). Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 873, Lot 10.

Designated: November 18, 2008

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.  
 Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM.