

SEARS ROEBUCK & COMPANY DEPARTMENT STORE, 2227-2323 Beverly Road (aka 2388-2420 Bedford Avenue) Brooklyn. Built 1932; Nimmons, Carr & Wright, with Alton L. Craft, architects

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map 5133, Lot 14 in part, consisting of the area of the property covered by the footprint of the existing building, including the area of the property below the canopies on the western facade of the building and including an area of the property adjacent to the rear facade of the building bounded as follows: beginning at the northeast corner of the building, thence running north along the Bedford Avenue property line 12 feet and thence running parallel to the northern facade of the building 54 ½ feet to the point of intersection with the entrance pavilion

On March 22, 2011 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Sears Roebuck & Company Department Store and the proposed designation of the related Landmark site. The first hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with provisions of law. One person testified in support of designation, a representative of the Historic Districts Council. On March 27, 2012 a second hearing was held; representatives of the Sears Holding Corporation and the owner of the property expressed support for the designation but asked that the Commission exclude the rear parking lot.

Summary

The Flatbush branch of Sears Roebuck & Company is an impressive late example of the Art Deco style. Located where Bedford Avenue and Beverly Road meet, this three-story retail structure was designed by the Chicago architects Nimmons, Carr & Wright, in association with Alton L. Craft of New York City. Sears announced plans to erect a large department store in Brooklyn in March 1932. Founded as a catalogue company in the early 1890s, it did not enter the retail market until 1925. Both Sears and its architect had little previous experience with chain store design. While the first branches to open featured classical ornamentation, by the late 1920s Sears had settled on a restrained yet stylish corporate image enlivened by Art Deco details. These stores were planned for the motoring age; most locations were convenient to major streets and customer parking was provided at no charge. To distinguish each branch from more utilitarian structures, most Sears stores featured a highly-visible tower with prominent signage on each side, as well as panels or thin bands of abstract two-dimensional relief that emphasized the placement of the original street entrances. At the opening of the Flatbush store in November 1932, Eleanor Roosevelt addressed the audience. It was her last public appearance before Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected 32nd President of the United States. In spite of difficult economic times, the store was a great success and it provided considerable employment to Brooklyn residents. The building was significantly expanded in 1940, adding four seamless bays along Beverly Road, as well as additional square footage at the rear. Of the three large retail outlets that Sears opened in the metropolitan region during 1932, the Flatbush store is the only one that continues to operate. While much of the original fenestration is currently disguised by plastic panels and the large display windows have been removed, the street elevations are generally well preserved and retain their historic materials and characteristics.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Flatbush¹

For eight decades, Sears Roebuck & Company has operated a department store in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. The building occupies the southeast corner of a trapezoidal lot, bordered by Beverly Road, Bedford Avenue, East 22nd Street, and Tilden Avenue. Bedford Avenue is a significant north-south transit corridor. Named for the rural village of Bedford, near what is current-day Fulton Street in Bedford Stuyvesant, in the late 1890s municipal authorities developed plans to straighten its “devious course in Flatbush,” to create one of the borough’s longest continuous streets – a ten-mile “highway” extending south from Greenpoint to Sheepshead Bay.² Beverly Road, sometimes spelled Beverley, parallels the store’s south elevation.³

By the 1920s, much of Flatbush Avenue (a block to the west) was a lively, low-rise commercial strip, especially in the vicinity of Church Avenue. It was a busy area populated by small businesses and some chain stores, as well as an entertainment district, with a dozen movie houses. The Flatbush Savings Bank (1927) had a branch at the northeast corner of Flatbush Avenue and Duryea Place, and a sales office of the Flatbush Gas Company, a subsidiary of Brooklyn Union Gas, opened at 19 Duryea Place in 1930. The most famous movie palace was the Loew’s Kings (1929), which boasted a Baroque-style interior seating almost 3,700. With its main entrance facing Flatbush Avenue, between Duryea Place and Tilden Avenue, this legendary venue was little more than block from where Sears would soon build.

Sears Roebuck & Company

Catalogue sales made Sears Roebuck & Company one of the leading retailers in the United States.⁴ Founded in Chicago in the early-1890s, it initially catered to rural America, shipping thick catalogues and mail-order merchandise to outlying areas where large stores seldom existed and consumer choice was limited. Sales increased fourfold during the 1910s and large mail-order distribution centers were developed by Sears in Dallas (1913-25), Seattle (1915), and Philadelphia (1920).

Sears entered the retail field in 1925. At first, many stores were part of existing mail-order facilities. This strategy substantially reduced initial start-up costs and appealed to suburban customers who often lived in the vicinity. Robert E. Wood, who became Sears vice president for factories and stores in 1924 and president in 1928, oversaw the company’s rapid expansion into retail sales. His program was an enormous success and by 1929 it ranked third in the country in net sales, behind such established national chains as J.C. Penny and F.W. Woolworth.⁵ Sears would open three distinct types of retail locations: free-standing department stores like the Flatbush branch, referred to as “A” stores, smaller “B” stores that addressed a specific market, and “C” stores which emphasized appliances or automotive products. The company thrived throughout the Depression, growing to 400 stores in 1933, and more than 600 stores in 1941.

In the early 20th century, New York City was an important manufacturing center. Sears maintained a buying office in Manhattan, with locations at 438 Broadway (1907), followed by 115 Fifth Avenue (1920) and 881 Broadway (1928). In 1930, a lease was signed to occupy ten floors in a new loft-and-storage building at 360 West 31st Street (Frank S. Parker, 1930-31) on the southeast corner of Ninth Avenue. Often called the Sears Roebuck Building, by 1940 there

were about 128 buyers and Sears support staff, including a catalogue production manager. Sears also invested in (and later owned) Henry Rose Stores Inc., a local women's ready-to-wear company.⁶ During 1930-32, about 20% of all merchandise sold by the company was manufactured in the metropolitan region. This statistic was said to indicate that Sears was "determined to make itself felt as a retailer in a district where in the past its most concentrated buying has been done."⁷

Sears opened its first retail store in New York City in 1930. Located in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, near Ebbets Field (demolished 1960), it was about a mile-and-a-half from the current branch. At least five additional stores would be established in the metropolitan area during 1930 – in Jamaica, Queens; on Fordham Road in the Bronx; New Rochelle; and Mt. Vernon. These were categorized as "B" stores, relatively modest ventures that offered customers a limited selection of automotive and accessory supplies, as well as appliances, hardware, and sporting goods. Sears also played a supporting role in the George Washington Bicentennial activities of 1932, fabricating full-size replicas of Federal Hall and Mt. Vernon. Federal Hall was displayed in Bryant Park, while Mt. Vernon, designed by architect Charles K. Bryant, was shipped from Port Newark, New Jersey, and exhibited on the peninsula near the lake in Prospect Park, close to where the Flatbush store would soon open.⁸

Site

Sears chose the Flatbush location as part of a consistent business strategy. Neither Bedford Avenue nor Beverly Road was a major shopping street, but this large site was relatively close to Flatbush Avenue where small retailers were concentrated. While many well-known department stores catered to women and were located in lively urban centers, close to public transit, Sears decided to instead target the "motoring shopper." During this period, most drivers were men and most of its branches were on, or close to, major transit routes. Here, property costs were significantly lower than downtown Brooklyn and large numbers of cars could be easily accommodated. Furthermore, as part of central Brooklyn, Flatbush was midway between the older neighborhoods to the north and areas to the south where the population was growing and much of the new housing stock was built with garages.

The site was assembled in two stages. As originally planned, it consisted of two city blocks, numbers 5133 and 5134a, separated by the long-projected route of East 23rd Street. When condemnation proceedings failed to be executed in the mid-1920s, these blocks were merged. In 1932, the Cheshill Realty Corporation quietly secured 25 parcels on the north side of Beverly Road and along the aborted route of 23rd Street, as well as on East 22nd Street and the west side of Bedford Avenue. A writer for the *Brooklyn Eagle* described these private negotiations as the "Flatbush mystery."⁹

Following the store's opening in 1932, the property was transferred to Sears Roebuck & Company, and then, soon after, to the Beverly Bedford Corporation. In anticipation of the store's 1940 expansion, nine or ten additional lots were acquired in 1939, mostly along Beverly Road or East 22nd Street. This 22,000 square foot plot would be primarily used for parking.¹⁰

Design & Construction

In March 1932, Sears announced plans to build a department store in Brooklyn. This was part of a larger program to enter the New York market, with similar branches in Hackensack and

Union City, New Jersey. Although the latter two sites had been purchased three and six months earlier, officials delayed their announcement until the entire Flatbush site had been assembled. The *New York Times* reported: "It has more than 500 feet of frontage in the two chief streets and consists of a score of properties, including ten or more homes and a part of a site of the old Flatbush car bars. Most of the buildings already have been vacated."¹¹ Construction was expected to begin shortly and the same newspaper wishfully characterized the project as a "striking object lesson in an early return of normal business conditions."¹² Each structure was estimated to cost \$1 million. Sears would also invest about \$4 million to outfit the three stores with fixtures and equipment. According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, each branch would "handle about 48,000 articles, grouped in 12 specialty shops."¹³

Walter Kidde Constructors, Inc. served as contractor. This company, which began as a manufacturer of fire protection equipment, was founded by the New Jersey industrialist Walter Kidde (1877-1943). It became an independent firm in 1929, specializing in concrete construction. Kidde built model homes for Prudential Insurance (1933), the Thomas A. Edison Memorial Tower (1933), as well as shipping facilities at Port Newark in New Jersey and the Brooklyn Navy Yard.¹⁴

Sears submitted plans to the Department of Buildings for a "store and storage building" in April 1932.¹⁵ To prepare the site, mostly residential structures were demolished, including private row houses, modest apartment buildings, and commercial buildings. Ground was broken during July 1932 and by early September the reinforced concrete frame neared completion. The *Brooklyn Eagle* optimistically reported that "work on the building was being rushed to complete it for business early in October."¹⁶

The store was positioned at the southeast corner of the site, with the main elevations stretching west along Beverly Road and north along Bedford Avenue. As originally planned, the store was L-shaped, with a "receiving room" extending from the rear. Accessible from both streets, the parking lot could accommodate 250 vehicles, and possibly more. Most Sears stores were planned in this manner; customers no longer needed to seek out curb-side parking and there was no charge or purchase necessary to enjoy this modern convenience. Furthermore, to place drivers at ease, air and water were provided, as well as a six-bay service station, close to the Bedford Avenue entrance, where they could check their oil or buy tires.

As originally configured, the store's street elevations were 47½ feet tall and asymmetrical, with nine nearly identical bays (240 feet) on Bedford Avenue and just four bays (136 feet) on Beverly Road. Each bay framed a large display window, except for the entrance bays which project slightly and are more richly decorated. To protect customers from inclement weather, the entrances were recessed, with pairs of double glazed doors set below clerestories. Where the sidewalks meet, the corner of the lot was left open, creating a small triangular plaza. This arrangement permitted a somewhat wider bay at the base of the tower, with display windows on both the first and second floors. These corner windows were especially visible to drivers and functioned like a billboard.

The corner tower, at about 103 feet tall, was the most conspicuous architectural feature. Many Sears stores (and warehouses) incorporated a similar element, often crowned by a flagpole. Though it probably disguised the "unsightly water tower and bulky equipment, such as fans and blowers of the ventilating system," the primary value was promotional.¹⁷ Visible above most buildings in the immediate area, including Flatbush Avenue, all four sides advertise the store with outsized capital letters. Though Nimmons, Carr & Wright sometimes used raised or

incised lettering that was part of the masonry, here, as well as in Union City, the letters were attached with recognizable bolts.

Architects

The Flatbush store was designed by Nimmons, Carr & Wright, in association with Alton L. Craft. George C(roll) Nimmons (1865-1947) was the firm's principal architect.¹⁸ He began his career in the mid-1880s as a draftsman with the Chicago firm Burnham & Root and in 1898 formed a partnership with architect William K(inne) Fellows (1870-1948) that lasted until 1911. It was with Fellows that Nimmons began his relationship with Sears Roebuck & Company. Their first commission is believed to have been a large Prairie-style mansion outside Chicago for the company president, Julius Rosenwald, built in 1903, followed by a group of buildings at the Sears headquarters that were begun in 1905 and expanded later. Designed in the neo-Renaissance style, the complex featured an administration building, research laboratory and mail order building, as well as formal gardens. The most striking architectural feature was probably the campanile-like tower, containing a 200,000 gallon water tank. Nimmons & Fellows also built a summer house in 1906 for Richard W. Sears, the company's co-founder and first president, in Grayslake, Illinois.

Sears became their most important client and the various firms that Nimmons headed would build warehouses and stores in approximately 65 cities and 28 states. George W(allace) Carr (1879-1958) joined the office around 1914, and Clark C(hittenden) Wright (1880-1948) in 1915.¹⁹ They eventually became partners and around 1928 the firm was known as Nimmons, Carr & Wright. In collaboration with Leslie S. Janes, who headed the Sears Planning and Display Department, they created practical store designs that promoted good customer circulation and sales. Of the various projects commissioned by Sears, two of the best known were built in Chicago: a pavilion for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition and the Englewood store at 63rd and Halsted Streets (1933-34, both demolished), which was promoted as the "World's Most Modern Store."²⁰ Except for the reduced number of window openings above the sidewalk, this store shared many similarities with the recently-completed Flatbush branch, including a similar arrangement of entrances and display windows, as well as a monumental central tower.²¹ Nimmons retired in 1945 and the firm was renamed Carr & Wright in 1947. At this time, it was described by the *Chicago Daily Tribune* as "one of Chicago's oldest and best known architectural firms."²²

The Flatbush store is likely to be Nimmons, Carr & Wright's only work in New York City. With many stores under construction at the same time, they frequently sought out local firms as partners. In Brooklyn, for instance, they worked with the architect Alton L. Craft²³ who was active in the metropolitan area for three decades, from the 1930s through about 1960. Relatively little is known about his career. In the mid-1950s, Craft converted the American Safety Razor factory building into classrooms for the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, and in 1958-60 he designed a municipal parking garage at Eighth Avenue and 53rd Street in midtown Manhattan.

Commerce and the Art Deco Style

The Flatbush store was built towards the end of the Art Deco era. Originally described as "modernistic" or sometimes "modern," this popular style developed in the mid-1920s as an alternative to classicism and other historic modes. It had a casual connection to the Paris Exposition des Arts Decoratifs & Industriels of 1925 and recent Europeans trends, as well as to

American architecture, particularly works by the Chicago architects Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, who Nimmons (or Carr) credited as important influences in a 1932 article on the firm's work.²⁴

Art Deco was especially popular with American retailers. During this period, a significant group of Manhattan stores were designed in this style, such as Stewart & Company (1928-30, demolished), the Bedell Store (1928, demolished) and S. H. Kress (1935, demolished), as well as large additions to Bloomingdales (1930) on Lexington Avenue, and Abraham & Straus (1929-35, now Macy's) on Fulton Street in Brooklyn. It was also popular with real estate developers who used fashionable and often colorful decorative motifs to attract tenants and customers to speculative projects. Many examples were located in busy shopping districts and along the routes of new or projected subway lines in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens. And since this style was relatively new, in difficult economic times a fresh image may have been interpreted as offering a competitive edge.

For Sears, architecture became a form of branding. Large chains, like the F.W. Woolworth stores and Horn & Hardart restaurants, had successfully employed a consistent design vocabulary to attract attention to their branches. Though Nimmons had a long association with Sears, neither the architect nor company had much, if any, experience with retailing and it took several years before they settled on a consistent approach. At the beginning, the stores resembled industrial plants, while subsequent structures, such as in Camden, New Jersey (1927), incorporated modest classical references. By the end of the 1920s, however, their designs became somewhat more stylish. In the Flatbush store, decorative reliefs were used to draw attention to the entrances and tower, as well as to help distinguish the store from humbler utilitarian structures. Executed in colors that complement the limestone facade, these attractive panels were modern without being flashy, reflecting the company's reputation for selling practical goods at fair prices.

The entrance bays are the most distinctive sections of the facade. Slightly wider and taller than the neighboring bays, the windows are flanked by limestone piers. Lacking capitals and bases, such piers enliven the elevations and gently challenge the classical orthodoxy in which the architects were trained. The incised spandrel panels, on the other hand, are more ornate. Among the most distinctive aspects of the Art Deco style was the use of two-dimensional abstract imagery. Though these limestone panels lack color, each row seems to have been conceived as part of a sequence of images. While the lowest group is tightly compact and suggests a bulb, the longer reliefs, at the third story, are slender and stalk-like. These stylized plant-forms, like the popular frozen fountain motif that gained notoriety at the Paris Exposition, may have been meant to signify growth or prosperity. Furthermore, the general shape suggests the sculpted forms that Frank Lloyd Wright used on such memorable works as Unity Temple (1905) in Chicago and the Hollyhock House (1916-20) in Los Angeles, as well as in some of his stained glass designs.

The remaining decorative reliefs are brownish cast stone. This color was probably chosen so that the elevations read as alternating dark and light vertical stripes, a treatment that was recently used on the exteriors of the Daily News (1929-30) and Empire State Buildings (1929-31), as well as in Rockefeller Center (begun 1931, all are designated Landmarks). Beneath each window, the spandrels feature a fluted pattern capped by small triangles, while each side of the corner tower is marked by thin bands of abstract relief. Arranged in three parallel lines, with U- or T-shaped reliefs at the center and continuous mirror-image zigzags on either side, these vertical embellishments accentuate the height of the tower and direct the eye upward, towards the Sears sign.

History of the Flatbush Store

When the Flatbush store opened on November 5, 1932, it was the second of the three Sears branches planned in the metropolitan area to debut.²⁵ Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt, addressed the audience. It was her last public appearance before he was elected President of the United States. According to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, she “not only opened the store by turning a key in the Beverly Road entrance in the morning, but accompanied by Mrs. Henry Hesterberg, wife of the Borough President, she made the first purchase, a pair of baby’s booties.”²⁶ From a grandstand located at the southeast corner of the building, Roosevelt said these Sears stores were “commendable because it gives considerable employment.” This was particularly important during the Depression era and approximately 300 people were hired to staff the Flatbush branch. While a Sears board member promised to “mold” the store to meet local needs, other speakers addressed the role of women as shoppers and how the population south of Prospect Park was steadily growing. An estimated 50,000 people “thronged the new \$1,500,000 store,” including a rush of about 15,000 shoppers following the morning ceremonies.²⁷

Despite the current economic picture, the store proved to be a huge success. In 1933, it began to open evenings (the parking lot was equipped with lighting) and Sears announced that 75 to 100 employees were being added to the payroll. In 1934, the Flatbush store led all Sears branches in increased sales, and a year later, to celebrate the third anniversary, Alvah Curtis Roebuck, the company’s co-founder, visited. As an expression of the store’s commitment to Brooklyn, a large auditorium, sometimes called “Sears Hall,” was established on the third floor in April 1936. Marie Fisher LaGuardia, the mayor’s wife, attended the opening. Available to local groups without charge, this “tastefully decorated” space could accommodate 650 users.²⁸

In May 1940, Sears filed plans to expand the eight-year-old Flatbush store. In newspaper advertisements, Sears praised its customers:

You helped build this greater store . . . Our volume of business grew rapidly . . . our stocks increased in size and variety . . . yet, as great as our accommodations were, they were outgrown by the demands of our ever expanding group of satisfied customers. So, tomorrow, we will add to our facilities and service by opening a new wing which has just been completed on our fine, modern building.²⁹

Nimmons, Carr & Wright were also responsible for designing the addition, which extended 87 additional feet west down Beverly Road.³⁰ The unbalanced character of the original street elevations suggests that an addition had always been planned once sufficient property was available. In a 1940 letter, Wright claimed that additional toilets had been included in the 1932 design to accommodate a “possible future extension.”³¹

The four bays that face the street appear almost seamless with earlier construction, displaying identical materials and fenestration. Sears property manager L.B. Dewitt described the expanded branch as “modernistic, without being exaggerated in this respect.” The use of “severe lines,” according to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, “provide the utmost space economy, but they are so arranged as to give the whole building an air of both dignity and grace.”³²

Following the demolition of 11 houses, ground was broken and the same general contractor, William Kidde Constructors, Inc., working with more than 20 subcontractors, completed the project in November 1940. Estimated to cost \$750,000, this six-month project

added approximately 43,000 square feet of shopping and storage space, making the structure a total of 170,000 square feet. The size of the parking lot was also increased by 20,000 square feet, accommodating “several hundred additional cars.”³³

To celebrate the expansion, the *Brooklyn Eagle* published a “special section” devoted to Sears and its employees. Included were upbeat texts about the history of the business, letters from local politicians and retail rivals, as well as advertisements from contractors and clients offering congratulations. At this time, the number of employees exceeded 400, with 240 women and 160 men. As was the case in 1932, management claimed that “local applicants were given preference.”³⁴

Sears merged with the K-Mart chain of department stores in 2005 and is now part of the Sears Holdings Corporation. It currently operates nearly four thousand stores, including the Flatbush branch. In recent decades, there have been significant alterations to the exterior of the building. Prior to 1989, all of the display windows were filled and painted over. Roll-down gates were added to the entrances in 1991. Much of the fenestration has been also altered. Some rear windows were closed off in 1994 and most of the windows are currently disguised by green plastic panels with Art Deco patterning. At present, the only access to the store is through a single entrance in the parking lot, close to Bedford Avenue.

Description

Located at the corner of Beverly Road (south) and Bedford Avenue (east) in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, the 1932 Sears Roebuck Department Store building is a three-story structure with a prominent corner tower. Constructed with reinforced concrete, the facing is mostly limestone, with vertical cast-stone bands dividing and flanking the windows. The dark-colored spandrels are probably cast stone or terra-cotta. The structure was expanded in 1940. These later additions mostly face the rear and are faced with brick. The current entrance is located in a small pavilion on the north side of the building in the parking lot, close to Bedford Avenue.

Significant features: *Beverly Road*, seven three-window bays with fluted spandrels, projecting entrance bay, Sears Roebuck sign (all caps) cast into wall above former recessed entrance; *Bedford Avenue*, three window bays with fluted spandrels, projecting entrance bay, Sears Roebuck sign (all caps) cast into wall above former recessed entrance; *tower at corner*, three cast stone reliefs at top of second story, three window openings at third story, vertical bands of decorative relief from top of the third story to bottom of sign on all sides, side windows in the upper stories, Sear Roebuck and Co. sign (cast stone letters, all caps, Sears painted red); *rear west facade*, adjoining Beverly Road sidewalk, three-window bay with fluted spandrels above first story; *rear north facade*, adjoining Bedford Avenue sidewalk, three-window bay with fluted spandrels above first story.

Alterations: Plastic decorative panels cover most window openings; most of the second and third story fenestration that faces parking lot has been filled in and painted over; all first-story display windows have been filled and painted over; roll-down gates over various entrances; lighting fixtures at base of second story, globe-like lighting fixtures at base of third story on tower, lighting fixtures projecting from top of the tower on three sides; rear addition, brick facing, illuminated Sears signs close to Beverly Road and Bedford Avenue entrances, loading docks with cantilevered concrete awning and lighting date to 1940s or 1950s, service entrances;

fourth story, roof antennae, roof air conditioning unit; current entrance pavilion, near Bedford Avenue.

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NOTES

¹ Flatbush was settled by the Dutch in the 1650s and became a hub of activity on western Long Island. Originally called Midwout or middle woods, it was ceded to the British in 1664 and renamed Flatbush, a corruption of the Dutch term “vlakke bos,” meaning wooded plain. Following the Civil War, the area’s agricultural character began to wane. Transportation improvements, such as the extension of horse car lines along Flatbush Avenue in 1860 and the opening of the Brooklyn Flatbush & Coney Island Railroad (later known as the subway’s Brighton Line) in 1878, led to the construction of such notable civic structures as Flatbush Town Hall (1874-75, a designated Landmark) and Flatbush District No.1 School (1878, 1894, a designated Landmark). Though the City of Brooklyn attempted to annex Flatbush in 1873, it remained independent until 1894, four years before merging with Greater New York. After 1900, a succession of planned residential communities (all designated Historic Districts) took shape to the west, between Ocean and Coney Island Avenues: Prospect Park South, Ditmas Park, and Fiske Terrace-Midwood Park.

² “News from the Suburbs: Bedford Avenue’s Devious Course in Flatbush,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 14, 1896, 5.

³ It appears on the 1873 Beers map of Flatbush as the “Road to Canarsie.” In 1897, however, the Common Council approved a new name. Though street names were sometimes modified to avoid duplication, this change was requested by local real estate developers who believed rural-sounding English names would enhance the area’s picturesque qualities and attract residents, See “Renaming of Flatbush Streets,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 15, 1896, 7; “Corporation Notices,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (November 27, 1897), 9; “Prospect Park South Historic District, Borough of Brooklyn,” Designation Report (LP-0979) (City of New York, 1979), 8.

⁴ Boris Emmet and John E. Jack, *Catalogues and Counters: A History of Sears Roebuck and Company* (University of Chicago Press, c. 1950); Stephen Eskilson, “Sears Beautiful,” *Chicago History* (Fall 2000), 26-43; Richard Longstreth, “Sears Roebuck and the Remaking of the Department Store, 1924-42,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (June 2006), 238-279; <http://www.searsarchives.com>, last viewed in December 2011.

⁵ In 1928, retailer J. C. Penney opened its 1,000 store.

⁶ “Store History – New York,” see http://www.searsarchives.com/stores/history_newyork.htm

⁷ “Sears-Roebuck Spends \$100,000,000 in N.Y. in Two Years,” *Hartford Courant*, October 26, 1932, viewed online at Proquest.com

⁸ “Prospect Park Gets Washington Shrine,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1932, 1; “Mt. Vernon” Here Fails to Reopen,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1933, 21.

⁹ “Lehman and Wagner Also To Take Part in the Ceremonies,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 4, 1932.

¹⁰ “Adds to Flatbush Store,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1939, 43.

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- ¹¹ “3 Stores Planned by Sears, Roebuck,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1932, 38. This article was accompanied by a rendering of the Union City store that was described as “similar” in type and size to the Flatbush building.
- ¹² “Country Estates in Good Demand,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1932, S10.
- ¹³ “Sears to Build Three Stores in Gotham Area,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 22, 1932; “Sears Will Build Three Large Units,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 1932; “Sears Roebuck to Move Into New York District,” *Hartford Courant*, March 22, 1932; all viewed at Proquest.com
- ¹⁴ “Walter Kidde,” *Prominent Families of New Jersey in Two Volumes* (1945), Volume 1, 53, viewed at [books.Google.com](http://books.google.com).
- ¹⁵ “Plans filed,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 9, 1932.
- ¹⁶ *Brooklyn Eagle*, clipping, Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Central Library.
- ¹⁷ These remarks described the tower of the Hackensack store. See “Eight Modern Department Stores,” *Architectural Forum* 58 (May 1933), 372.
- ¹⁸ “Sear Roebuck and Company Warehouse Building,” North Kansas City, National Register of Historic Places, 1997, see <http://dnr.mo.gov/shpo/nps-nr/97000411.pdf>
- ¹⁹ “Clark Wright, Architect, Dies at Age of 68,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 13, 1946, A2; “George W. Carr, 79, Architect, 50 Years, Dies,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 26, 1958.
- ²⁰ Eskilson, 37.
- ²¹ “Plan ‘Windowless’ Building for Department Store Firm,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 8, 1934.
- ²² “Old Architect Firm Revised to Carr & Wright,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 22, 1947.
- ²³ “Flatbush: Architecture and Urban Development from Dutch Settlement to Commercial Strip,” Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University (1990), 78.
- ²⁴ Cited by Longstreth, 250, footnote 35.
- ²⁵ The Hackensack store opened first. See “Open Store in Hackensack,” *New York Times*, October 28, 1932, 38; “Ceremony to Open Store,” *New York Times*, November 9, 1932, 34.
- ²⁶ “50,000 Visit New Sears Roebuck Flatbush Store,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 6, 1932.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ “City Will Accept New Sears Hall,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 13, 1935; “New Sears Hall Opened to Public,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 15, 1936, clippings, Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Central Library.
- ²⁹ “Sears Special Section,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 11, 1940, A13.
- ³⁰ Nimmons, Carr & Wright collaborated with Arthur B. Miller, who oversaw the alterations. See Department of Buildings, affidavit, October 30, 1940.
- ³¹ Letter from C(lark) Wright to William Collins at Walter Kidde, April 26, 1940, filed with Brooklyn Department of Buildings.
- ³² “Flatbush Store Opened by Sears Eight Years Ago,” November 11, 1940, clipping, Brooklyn Collection, Brooklyn Central Library.
- ³³ Brooklyn Department of Buildings, Alt 1128-40, May 12, 1940; “Armistice Rites Set Tomorrow,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 10, 1940; “Sears Special Section,” A13.
- ³⁴ “95% of Employees at Sears are Residents of Boro, L.I., Addition to Store Increases Staff from 300 to 450,” “Sears Special Section,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 11, 1940.

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 Sears Roebuck & Company Department Store 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 Flatbush branch of Sears Roebuck & Company is an impressive late example of the Art Deco style; that it is located at the corner of Bedford Avenue and Beverly Road; that this three-story retail structure was designed by the Chicago architects Nimmons, Carr & Wright, in association with Alton L. Craft of New York City; that Sears announced plans to erect this store in March 1932; that the company was founded in the 1890s but did not enter the retail market until 1925; that Sears and the architects had limited experience with chain store design; that while the earliest branches featured classical ornamentation, by the late 1920s they had settled on a restrained yet stylish corporate image enlivened by Art Deco details; that Sears stores were planned for the motoring age, convenient to major streets and customer parking was provided at no charge; that to distinguish branches from more utilitarian structures, most stores featured a highly-visible central tower with signage on each side, as well as panels or thin bands of abstract two-dimensional relief that emphasized the original entrances; that Eleanor Roosevelt attended the store opening in November 1932; that it was her last public appearance before Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President of the United States; that despite difficult economic times, the store was a great success, providing considerable employment to Brooklyn residents; that the building was significantly expanded in 1940, adding four seamless bays along Beverly Road, as well as additional square footage at the rear; that of the three retail stores that Sears opened in the metropolitan area during 1932, the Flatbush branch is the only one that continues to operate; and that while much of the original fenestration has been altered or disguised, the street elevations are generally well preserved and retain their historic materials and characteristics.

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 Sears Roebuck & Company Department Store at 2227-2323 Beverly Road (aka 2388-2420 Bedford Avenue) as a Landmark and designates Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map 5133, Lot 14 in part, consisting of the area of the property covered by the footprint of the existing building, including the area of the property below the canopies on the western facade of the building and including an area of the property adjacent to the rear facade of the building bounded as follows: beginning at the northeast corner of the building, thence running north along the Bedford Avenue property line 12 feet and thence running parallel to the northern facade of the building 54 ½ feet to the point of intersection with the entrance pavilion, as its Landmark site.

Commissioners:

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo Vengoechera, Vice Chair

Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, Christopher Moore,

Margery Perlmutter, Libby Ryan, Roberta Washington



Sears Roebuck & Company Department Store

2307 Beverly Road (aka 2301-2323 and 2201-2223 Beverly Road; 2386-2420 Bedford Avenue
111-133 and 149-173 East 22nd St.), Brooklyn.

Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 5112, Lot 14 in part
View from intersection of Beverly Road and Bedford Avenue

Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2012



Bedford Avenue facade

Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2012



Former entrance, Bedford Avenue
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2012



Beverly Road facade
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2012



Rear (west) facade, Beverly Road facade
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2012



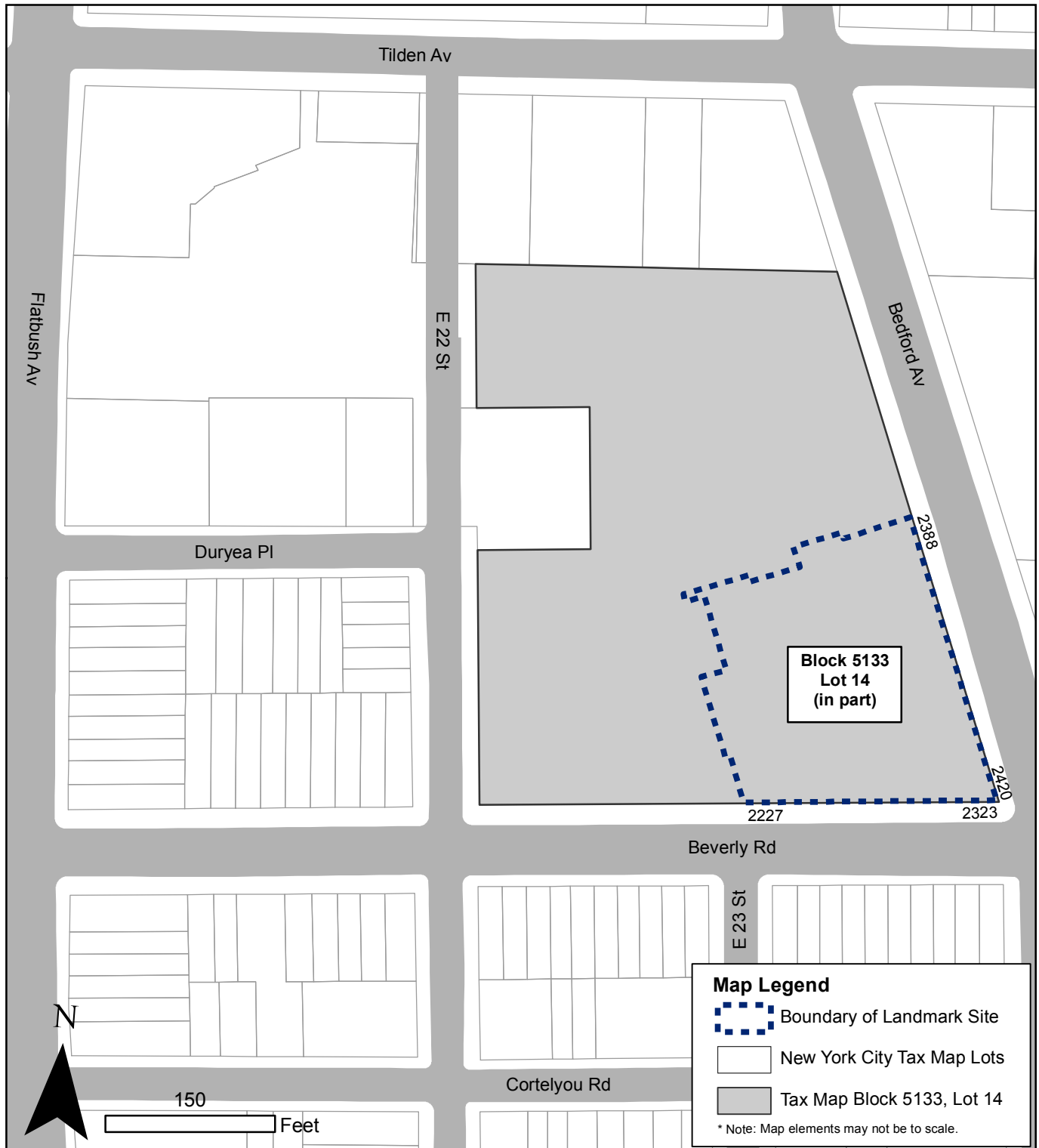
View from parking lot, north and west facades
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2012



View of entrance from parking lot, Bedford Avenue
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2012



Former entrance, Beverly Road
Bedford Avenue on right
Photo: Christopher D. Braze, 2012



SEARS ROEBUCK & COMPANY STORE (LP-2469), 2227-2323 Beverly Road (aka 2388-2420 Bedford Avenue)
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map 5133, Lot 14 in part, consisting of the area of the property covered by the footprint of the existing building, including the area of the property below the canopies on the western facade of the building and including an area of the property adjacent to the rear facade of the building bounded as follows: beginning at the northeast corner of the building, thence running north along the Bedford Avenue property line 12 feet and thence running parallel to the northern facade of the building 54 ½ feet to the point of intersection with the entrance pavilion.

Designated: May 15, 2012