

HAMPTON SHOPS BUILDING

18-20 East 50th Street, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1285, Lot 59

Built: 1915-16

Architect: Rouse & Goldstone, and Joseph L. Steinman

Style: Neo-Gothic

Actions: Item Proposed for the Commission's Calendar on May 10, 2016

The Hampton Shops Building stands on the south side of East 50th Street, between Fifth and Madison Avenues. Constructed in 1915-16, during the era when East Midtown Manhattan was becoming a major commercial district, the architects were Rouse & Goldstone, and Joseph L. Steinman. Built just after the construction of Grand Central Terminal, this building is a representative of the earliest evolution in skyscraper development in East Midtown, prior to the passage of the 1916 zoning.

Designed in the neo-Gothic or Perpendicular Gothic style, it has an 11-story tripartite facade clad with grey terracotta that resembles granite. This style was chosen for various reasons; not only did it complement the buildings in the St. Patrick's Cathedral complex, which it faces, but the facade also evoked the kinds of traditional-style furniture that the store sold. Many newspaper articles praised the design, calling it interesting, unique, and "a wide departure from the ordinary loft building."

The opening of Grand Central Terminal coincided with an important era of skyscraper development, including a number of distinctive office towers built prior to the passage of the 1916 zoning ordinance. The Hampton Stores represents the earliest skyscraper form, which were located on small parcels once occupied by row houses, rising without interruption with ornament that emphasizes verticality.

Henry Mannes founded this firm in the 1860s. Earlier known as the Grand Rapids Furniture Company, it was renamed Hampton Shops in c. 1913 to differentiate the business from rivals with similar names. Above the entrance arcade, various carvings identified the original owner. Small heraldic shields incorporate the initials of Hampton Shops, as well as images of chairs and tables. A 1918 advertisement described the store as "a Gothic temple of art" where customers could visit 11 showroom galleries with "interiors of old world charm that equal in authenticity the finest examples in Europe." Antiques and modern reproductions were available for purchase, as well as paneled walls, molded ceilings, rugs, and "exclusive" draperies. In 1938, after 22 years at this location, Hampton Shops declared bankruptcy and the entire stock was sold at auction. In subsequent years, the building was subdivided and leased to a number



of businesses in the art and design field. Despite some modifications to the ground floor arcade, most of the original neo-Gothic ornament is well preserved.

