

Brooklyn Edison Building

345 Adams Street, Brooklyn
(aka 372-392 Pearl Street, 11-17 Willoughby Street)
Tax Map Block 140 Lot 7503 (previously Lot 123)

Built: 1922-1926

Architect: McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin

Style: Renaissance Revival

Proposed Action: Propose for Calendaring February 13, 2024



The Brooklyn Edison Building is an office building designed by McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin for the Brooklyn Edison Company and built between 1922-1926. Highly visible from Adams Street, Columbus Park and Fulton Streets, this Renaissance Revival style building is a notable landmark in the civic and commercial center of Brooklyn.

Originally headquartered at 360 Pearl Street, the Edison Electric Illuminating Company of Brooklyn was founded in 1887 to provide electricity to Brooklyn and formally organized as Brooklyn Edison Company after a merger in 1919. After the completion of subway lines by the 1920s, growth in residential development increased the demand for additional electricity capacity in Brooklyn. To answer this demand, the Brooklyn Edison Company purchased the adjacent lot to construct a new, larger building as its headquarters, and commissioned McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin to design it. Active between 1910 and 1925, the firm designed notable office and commercial buildings in New York City, including the Barclay-Vesey Building and Long Distance Building of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, both individual landmarks; and the Brooklyn Municipal Building, in the Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District.

The Brooklyn Edison Building was constructed in two phases. The first phase occurred in 1922-1923, and the building expanded northwards in 1926, doubling its footprint. Located prominently on the corner of Willoughby and Pearl Streets, it replaced Loew's Royal Theater. Recalling a grand Italian palazzo, it features a tripartite configuration with a stone base, brick middle section and set-back stone crown adopting the provisions 1916 Zoning Law. It is decorated with Renaissance Revival style elements, including double-sized arched windows, shields, festoon motifs, and quoins. Designed with the ambition of being the "last word" in office buildings, the building incorporated advanced technology in lighting and telephone systems. The auditorium of the building hosted events including charity fundraisers and meetings and played a pivotal role in Brooklyn's social life.

Originally located on the southeast corner of a larger block, the primary facades face Pearl and Willoughby Streets. During the construction of Brooklyn Civic Center and expansion of Adams Street in the 1950s, the western half of the block was removed, exposing the lower rear façade and forming a monumental backdrop to Downtown Brooklyn's civic center. Subsequent alterations to the ground story include the creation of storefronts along Adams Street, and modifications to replicate features on the original main facades. Despite these alterations, the building retains its historic character, and highly intact Renaissance Revival Style details. Recently, the building underwent a sensitive restoration under the ownership of the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services, and is still being used as an office building with commercial use on the ground and first stories.

The Brooklyn Edison Building was a testament to technological advancements and played an important role in the community's social and cultural activities. Today, highly visible from Adams Street, Columbus Park and Fulton Streets with its intact Renaissance Revival Style facades, the former Brooklyn Edison Building is a benchmark monument in the Downtown Brooklyn area.

