NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x' in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name The Niagara Hudson Building

other name/site number The Niagara Mohawk Building

2. Location

street & number 300 Erie Boulevard West ☐ not for publication

city or town Syracuse vicinity

state New York code 036 county Onondaga code 067 zip code 13210

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☒ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Russell Pumpont / DSHPO 4/26/10
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
- ☒ entered in the National Register.
  - ☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register
  - ☐ See continuation sheet.
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6/14/10

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ public-local
- ☒ private
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(check only one box)

- ☐ district
- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
2		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: office building

Current Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: office building

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
walls brick, cast stone, chrome, glass
roof asphalt built-up roofing
other steel frame

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1930-1932

Significant Dates

1930, 1932

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Bley & Lyman, consulting architects

Melvin L. King, architect

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5.26

UTM References
(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 405789 4767138
Zone Easting Northing

2 18
Zone Easting Northing

3 18
Zone Easting Northing

4 18
Zone Easting Northing

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anthony Opalka (see attached)

organization NYS Historic Preservation Office date April 2010

street & number PO Box 189 telephone

city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title

street & number telephone

city or town state zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

NARATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Niagara Hudson (Niagara Mohawk) Building (the main office building of what was the largest utility company in the United States at the time of its construction and known today as Building A) is a seven-story steel-frame building constructed between 1930 and 1932 in the Art Deco style. Adjacent to it is a more modest three-story steel frame and masonry building (known as Building B), constructed at the same time, that was originally a service building at the ground level with offices above. Today, both buildings, which constitute the nominated property, are office buildings, and service functions that were once part of Building B are performed elsewhere both on and off the site on Erie Boulevard.

Behind the two buildings that face Erie Boulevard West (the former Erie Canal) is a modern wing from 1970 that connects the two buildings on the street with a third old building at the back of the utility company's site along the Onondaga Creek. Neither the modern wing nor the building at the rear of the property is part of this nomination.

Building A

The main building is constructed in a ziggurat form and is symmetrical about the central axis that is the tower. It has one-bay "A" sections that are two stories in height, three-bay, four-story "B" sections, six-story two-bay "C" sections, flanking the wide seven-story center tower.

The first floor across the entire Erie Boulevard and Franklin Street fronts is sheathed in black Vitrolite glass and houses display windows flanking the wide entry at the base of the tower, as well as at the secondary entrance on Franklin Street. The arrangement of display windows and the divisions between them reflect the divisions of the large building sections above, unifying the public first story with the stories of office spaces above. What appear to be simple vertical chrome decorative strips are placed between each of the display windows. In actuality, these are shades housing concealed lighting tubes, an integral feature of the building. When lit, the light from these fixtures is reflected from the chrome panels that are mounted directly on the wall of the building to which these fixtures are attached. The original display windows, which have been altered, also contained concealed lighting, and above each of the windows remain original horizontal chrome strips crossed by vertical chrome light fixtures.

The center entrance at the base of the tower is afforded special architectural treatment that is two stories in height and covers the "C" sections that flank the tower at the first and second floors. At the first floor, a canopy sheathed in chrome and light fixtures shelters three pairs of double entry doors. Flanking the doors are display windows similar to those along the rest of the first floor, except that they are separated by two-story vertical piers rather than the single-story piers between the windows beyond the center.

Above the canopy is a metal screen with Vitrolite glass behind that also includes lighting behind the glass. At the level of the second story were backlighted lettering and a New York State map that originally said "Niagara Hudson." After 1950, when the company name changed, the lettering was changed to "Niagara Mohawk" but the lighting scheme remained intact. Above this is a decorative parapet. At this level, flanking the screen and lettering, windows are surrounded by Vitrolite similar to those throughout the remainder of the building, but unlike the remainder of the building, above the windows in the center section are decorative Art Deco details of ribbing, and in some cases, chevrons and semi-circles.

Above the center two-story façade element and the one-story display area in the remainder of the building, a light-colored brick cladding marks the vertical members of the steel frame. The stepped back character of these brick piers emphasizes the verticality of this part of the building. They are topped at various levels by concrete caps and at the top of each pier along the parapet wall. Spandrels between floors are recessed and constructed of stainless steel and windows are divided vertically, further emphasizing the verticality of the building.

At the center tower, there are further setbacks of each pier, and at the very top of each, the piers are constructed of special heat-resistant glass, behind which are high-wattage bulbs that light the tower. In the center of the tower above the sixth floor is the stainless steel sculpture 28 feet high and 20 feet across. The piece, called "The Spirit of Light," was fabricated in Buffalo and installed by a firm in Syracuse.

In addition to those found in the tower, decorative horizontally striped stainless steel spandrel panels are also found between windows in some areas of the flanking "B" wings. Along the parapet of the four-story "B" wings and the six-story "C" wings are concrete panels with Art Deco motifs between the bay divisions. In the four-story "B" wings, the center bays are marked by glass parapets with backlighting that is only perceptible when the building is lighted at night. During the day, these parapet panels are not substantially different in appearance from other parapet materials.

The interior of the Niagara Hudson Building A includes four contiguous areas that remain largely unchanged since the building was constructed. All are on the first floor. These are the Entry Vestibule, the Elevator Lobby, the Stair Hall and the former Sales Space.

The Entry Vestibule on the south side of the building retains its twelve original, stainless steel doors: six internal and six external. The black vitrolite wall treatment is unchanged, and the two interior display windows remain, one on either side of the vestibule. The room's original lighting is a continuous strip of sandblasted white plate glass running flush along all four walls, just below the ceiling.

The Elevator Lobby serves three elevators, all with their original etched, stainless steel doors. The terrazzo floors remain largely unchanged. Wall decorations consist of green marble, black marble, limestone, and black vitrolite. A 1970s era suspended ceiling was removed in 1999 and the original

reflective lighting system on the ceiling was restored. Four sand-blasted vitrolite murals are displayed on the walls of the lobby, depicting aspects of the energy industry: "Illumination", "Transmission", "Generation" and "Gas". These were created by the Ettlinger Co. of Buffalo.

The Stair Hall, between the Elevator Lobby and the Sales Space, is decorated with limestone and marble. It retains its original flooring, wall treatments and flush, plate-glass lighting fixtures. The banisters on the stairs to the basement are of stainless steel.

The "Sales Space" across the eastern end of the building was originally used to demonstrate electrical appliances for the home. It also served as a customer service area and for paying bills. An illuminated "Customers (*sic*) Service" sign remains in the northern wall; another illuminated sign says "Bill Paying." In 1999 the room was converted to serve as an auditorium.

There are ten pilasters in the Sales Space, four along each of the longer walls and two at either end of the room. These are constructed of limestone, black vitrolite and black marble. Four "beams" across the ceiling connect the pilasters along the longer walls. These beams include a continuous strip of lighting next to the ceiling with sandblasted white plate glass. Similar lighting also encircles the entire room where walls and ceiling meet.

The original vestibule and entryway to the Sales Space remains on the eastern wall. The ornate headers and pilasters around the doors are of stainless steel. The revolving door has been removed but four of the original stainless steel doors remain.

The remainder of the building consists of non-descript office space that was originally simply open floors with columns for flexible arrangements of rooms as needs changed. A board room that existed in the tower has since been removed.

Building B

The original appearance of Building B showed a strong horizontal emphasis with more of an Art Moderne style than the full-blown Art Deco style of Building A. At the first story, the corners were marked by three-story pavilions with windows centered in each story of the pavilions. Between each story is a series of horizontal brick courses that form spandrels and project from the plane of the walls. The projections of alternating brick courses results in a deep shadow that creates a strong horizontal appearance to these corner pavilions. Stretching between these corners are continuous spandrel panels that run the entire length of the building between the first and second stories, and above the third.

At the first story between the corners, the original arrangement was a series of piers marking garage bays that provided access to service vehicles from the street to ground level service areas both within and behind this building. Above those bays was a series of paired awning windows with four horizontal divisions, and between them, horizontally striped piers above each of the ground floor

piers. The building's three story height also helped emphasize its horizontality when contrasted with the taller Building A, which has a much more vertical articulation.

Since its original construction, all windows in Building B have been replaced with windows that do not fill the entire masonry openings and have vertical divisions. In addition, the open garage bays have been filled in as service functions are no longer performed in the first level of this building. They have been filled with windows that match those of the upper stories. However, the strong horizontal aspects of Building B have not been diminished, as the corner pavilion striping, the continuous spandrels between floors, and the masonry striping of the piers in the second and third stories directly above the piers of the first story have not been altered.

The original interior of Building B consisted of open floor space with support columns providing the only division of the space. Since that time, corridors and offices have been created as office space needs have changed and offices presently occupy the former service bays of the first story.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Niagara Hudson Building in Syracuse is significant under Criteria A and C as an outstanding example of Art Deco architecture and as a symbol of the Age of Electricity. Completed in 1932, the building became the headquarters for the nation's largest electric utility company and expressed the technology of electricity through its modernistic design and materials and extraordinary program of exterior lighting. The forward-looking building helped to brand the newly consolidated Niagara Hudson utility company. Its architectural style served as the corporate model for the design and re-styling of other company facilities in New York State. The new and powerfully sculpted and decorated building with its central tower and figurative winged sculpture personifying electric lighting offered a symbol of optimism and progress in the context of the Great Depression. Today, the building is widely recognized as an outstanding example of American Art Deco architecture. It is distinguished by its complex ziggurat forms, shining metal details and dramatic architectural lighting program. Taken together, these futuristic design elements transformed a corporate office tower into a widely admired beacon of light and belief in the future.

History of Niagara Hudson (Niagara Mohawk) Power Corporation

When the new Niagara Hudson Service Center complex opened in Syracuse on July 10, 1932, it was corporate headquarters to the nation's largest electrical utility system. Niagara Hudson generated and sold over 10 billion kilowatt hours of electricity – twice the output of its nearest rival.[1] Thanks to its Niagara Falls generating plants, it was also – by far – the largest producer of hydro-electric power in the country. In fact, from 1929 to 1938 Niagara Hudson was the largest seller of electrical energy in the world.[23]

Niagara Hudson served the richest industrial market in the United States, the 350-mile "Great Corridor" – established by the Erie Canal – stretching from Buffalo to Rochester to Albany. Within this area, General Electric manufactured one third of its electric equipment every year and Eastman Kodak assembled nearly all of the cameras produced in the country. The Aluminum Company of America operated three major plants. Armies of workers were employed by American Cyanimid, American Locomotive, American Radiator, Union Carbide, Vanadium and Bethlehem Steel.

The new electric power company was the culmination of a half century of industry consolidation, merging – in multiple stages – nearly two hundred smaller companies.[4]

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[1] "Niagara Hudson" Exhibit A of Superpower," *Fortune,* June 1931, Volume III< Number 6, p.43
[2] "World Record Kept by Niagara Hudson," *The New York Times,* March 21, 1932.
[3] Annual Report, *Niagara Hudson Power Corporation,* December 31, 1938, p.4.
[4] "*Niagara Mohawk, An Uncommon History,*" Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation, August 1, 2001.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, speculators became interested in the potential for using waterways in Central New York to generate power for mills. Among them was Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the U.S. Treasury. When Hamilton died at the hands of a political enemy in 1804, the land he had purchased along the Oswego River was sold to settle his debts. This became part of the land used to construct the Oswego Canal after 1823.[5]

In that year, long before the advent of electricity, the Oswego Canal Company was chartered by a special act of the New York State legislature as a private company to build a canal connecting the Erie Canal at Syracuse to Lake Ontario at Oswego. The company was to construct the canal and sell water power generated by the many rapids along the route. Soon after its formation, however, the State of New York took over construction of the transportation canal and eventually granted the rights to the water power to the private Oswego Canal Company.[6] Water power from the canal was sold to drive turbines directly connected to machinery in mills that lined the canal. Industries flocked to the power site, and this company became the earliest component of what would eventually become Niagara Hudson.[7]

The next component was the Cohoes Company, another water power company formed at Cohoes Falls, just above the junction of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. Its executives included Canvass White, a top ranking engineer in the construction of the Erie Canal [8] This company used the abandoned parts of the original Erie Canal following the enlargement and rerouting of the canal after 1835.

The Gas Light Company of Syracuse was established in 1849 to manufacture gas from coal for domestic and industrial use. In 1895 Syracuse Gas Company took over the franchise and business of the Gas Lighting Company of Syracuse. In 1902 the Gas Lighting Company of Syracuse was absorbed into the Syracuse Lighting Company.[9]

By 1928, three electric companies dominated Upstate New York:[10]

1. *Buffalo, Niagara & Eastern* served the western quarter of New York State. Founded by German immigrant Jacob Schoellkopf, the company grew from the first fledgling development of power at Niagara Falls to a vast corporation controlling power plants on both the American and Canadian sides of the falls. The plant on the American side was the largest

[5] Whitford, Noble E., History of the Canal System of the State of New York, together with Brief Histories of the Canals of the United States and Canada, State of New York, 1905, Chapter 7.
[6] Ibid.
[7] *An Uncommon History*
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] "Niagara Hudson: Exhibit A of Superpower," *Fortune,* June 1931, Volume III, Number 6, pp. 43-47.

hydroelectric station in the country. Buffalo, Niagara & Eastern also owned the electrical distribution system serving Buffalo and its suburbs. Producing 4.4 billion kilowatt hours per year, Buffalo, Niagara & Eastern was – at that time – the largest power producer in the U.S.

2. *Mohawk Hudson* was a holding company organized in 1925 by General Electric and United Gas Improvement (General Electric sold its stock in 1928). It served primarily the industrial area around Schenectady, but also included Utica Gas & Electric, Syracuse Lighting Company, and a string of smaller companies. Producing 1.1 billion kilowatt hours per year, Mohawk Hudson was ranked 16th in the nation.

3. *Northeastern Power* was controlled by the St. Regis Paper Company and included the Power Corporation of New York and Northern New York Utilities. It served primarily the sparsely settled area between the Mohawk Valley and the St. Lawrence River to the north. Producing only 630 million kilowatt hours per year, it was ranked 37th nationally. But Floyd L. Carlisle, Northeastern Power's president, would soon come to lead all three companies.

Although the companies were legally independent, they were coming to find their business dealing increasingly intertwined. Northeastern and Mohawk Hudson purchased power from Niagara & Eastern when it was cheaper than generating power on their own. When Northeastern and Mohawk Hudson could produce power more cheaply, Niagara & Eastern returned the favor.

The negotiations leading up to the three-way merger were relatively swift and untroubled, requiring less than a month from start to finish. The spark that ignited the effort was a cash bid from outside the area for the purchase of Buffalo, Niagara & Eastern. Suddenly, to prevent acquisition from outside the area, the three companies were anxious to discuss a merger. Floyd Carlisle led the effort, with the banking giant J. P. Morgan & Co. – which owned large blocks of Mohawk Hudson stock – lending guidance and assistance.

J. P. Morgan provided the calculus for the merger.[11] Each share of Niagara & Eastern would be worth four shares of the new company, called Niagara Hudson; each share of Mohawk Hudson would be worth 3.5 shares of Niagara Hudson; each share of Northeastern Power would be worth 2.67 shares of Niagara Hudson. On these terms, more than 95% of the outstanding stock of the old companies was exchanged and the merger was declared effective. Investors who purchased stock in the individual companies prior to the merger did quite well, realizing an average gain of about 100 percent within a period of just twenty weeks.

When it opened for business, Niagara Hudson had 648,679 customers. It operated ninety-three hydroelectric stations, producing 87 per cent of the total power output. The remaining 13 percent

[11] Ibid, p.44.

was produced by coal powered steam stations, with the Huntley Station at Niagara the largest of these.[12]

In addition to electricity, the newly formed company sold 8.5 billion cubic feet of gas each year, manufactured in nine cities in the Niagara Hudson corridor. By-products of gas manufacture were also profitable: 500,000 tons of coke a year, one million gallons of benzol, and ten million gallons of coal tar. Niagara Hudson planted approximately five million trees each year to convert wasteland into timber and to conserve water. It operated 101 stores selling everything that requires electricity: radios, waffle irons, washing machines, sewing machines, irons, toasters, egg cookers, corn poppers, fans and coffer makers.[13]

However, the merger of the three Upstate New York utilities had been pursued with yet another goal in mind: supplying power to New York City. This was a goal none of the three smaller companies could have accomplished on their own.

In 1931, Floyd Carlisle, chairman of the board of Niagara Hudson, was elected chairman of New York Edison, the major electric utility serving New York City. Months later came the announcement of plans to link the transmission systems of Niagara Hudson and New York Edison, with trunk lines to be built along the Hudson River through territory served by Central Hudson Gas & Electric.[14]

In 1933, the New York Edison-Niagara Hudson Power interconnection was complete, linking all the major power resources of the northeastern United States and eastern Canada. The resulting 116,000 square mile super-power reservoir incorporated one-fourth of the nation's water power resources, one-fourth of its steam generating plants and one-fourth of its population: 31 million persons. The New York Times called it "a force without parallel any-where in the world."[15]

In 1937, in the midst of the Great Depression, Niagara Hudson's electric and gas businesses were reorganized again. The 59 separate companies within its structure were reduced to 20, and these companies were separated into three wholly owned principal operating subsidiaries corresponding to their old geographical groupings. These three subsidiaries were Central New York Power Corporation, New York Power and Light Corporation, and Buffalo Niagara Electric Corporation. The entire company was incorporated under the name Central New York Power Corporation.[16]

By the end of the 1940s it became clear that the three separate administrative divisions were not appropriate and a final level of consolidation was undertaken. In 1950 the three operating divisions

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[12] Ibid., pp. 47-48.
[13] *An Uncommon History.*
[14] "Niagara Hudson: Exhibit A of Superpower," *Fortune,* June 1931, Volumne III, Number 6, p. 106.
[15] "Edison and Niagara Hudson Hook-Up Last Week Set Record for World," *The New York Times, May 7, 1933, p. 7, 9.*
[16] *An Uncommon History*

and the 20 companies within them were combined to form a single operating company, Niagara Mohawk Power Company.[17]

In March of 1999, to separate utility and non-utility operations, the company was reorganized again to form Niagara Mohawk Holdings, Inc. with Niagara Mohawk Power as a subsidiary. In 1999, Niagara Mohawk Power also sold its Huntley and Dunkirk coal stations to NRG Energy, Inc.[18]

In 2000 Niagara Mohawk was acquired by the British company, National Grid PLC, for approximately $3 billion. National Grid had already purchased two other New England power companies, and its takeover of Niagara Mohawk was its biggest acquisition to date. Niagara Mohawk was now part of the ninth largest electric utility in the United States with 3.3 million electricity customers and 540,000 natural gas customers.[19]

Architecture of the Niagara Hudson (Niagara Mohawk) Building and the Context of Art Deco

The seven-story Niagara Hudson (Niagara Mohawk) headquarters building is perhaps the most exuberant example of Art Deco architecture in New York State outside of New York City. It is a steel frame and masonry building constructed in a ziggurat form with a seven-story tower at the center of its east-west axis. Its exterior sheathing includes brick and cast stone, black glass, and chrome. The central tower is highlighted by a chrome sculpture called "The Spirit of Light." Immediately to the west of and attached to the main building which served as the offices for the company is a more modest three-story wing that originally included open garage service bays on the ground floor and horizontal bands of windows marking the office floors above. The garage bays have since been filled in with windows, and the former service functions of the first floor of this wing have been moved elsewhere.

This space converted to offices and the windows of the second and third stories have been replaced, but the overriding architectural character of the wing has not been compromised. The main building and adjacent wing comprise the nominated property. To the rear of the main building is a non-historic wing constructed in 1970 and at the rear of the property is an older building that is physically disconnected from the Erie Boulevard buildings. Neither is included in this nomination.

Construction of the building was begun in late 1930 and completed in 1932, in the early years of popularity of what is now called the Art Deco style in the United States. The following context of the Art Deco style was taken from the National Register nomination for the Barcley-Vesey Building in New York City (NR 4/30/09).

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] "National Grid Announces Niagara Mohawk Purchase," *The New York Times,* September 6, 2000, p. C4.

"Modernistic' styles, especially Art Deco, began to gain mainstream notice in the early 1920s with the *Chicago Tribune* design competition. In 1922, the *Chicago Tribune* held a competition open to architects worldwide in an effort to solicit the best design for their new headquarters building in Chicago. Although first place went to a Gothic-inspired design, the second place design exhibited the emerging Art Deco style and garnered much attention from the architectural community. The architect of the second place design was Finnish-born Eliel Saarinen. The design was widely publicized and much of the architectural community believed Saarinen's design should have placed first. Following the *Chicago Tribune* competition, Art Deco quickly spread across the United States as the fashionable design of the 1920s and was employed almost exclusively in commercial and civic structures; with the exception of luxury apartment buildings, Art Deco made little impact on residential architecture. The style is characterized by smooth wall surfaces, which are often finished with stucco. Ornamentation often includes zigzags, chevrons, and other stylized and geometric motifs. Art Deco buildings often use the vocabulary of towers and other vertical projections above rooflines to give the structures a vertical emphasis.[20]

Art Deco stood in stark contrast the other prevailing style of the early 1920s – stripped Classicism. Stripped Classicism strove to display the power of simplified geometrical forms by removing details characteristic of traditional building forms. These designs, while powerful in their geometry, often created somber images. Art Deco, on the other hand, sought to capture the energy and sensuality of the Jazz Age through ornamentation while employing simplified geometrical forms. This style initially developed in Europe as an amalgam of several sources: simplified Classical forms from the pre-war Viennese Secession movement, dynamic shapes such as zigzags, sunbursts, and dramatic angles from Italian Futurism and German Expressionism, and the opulence and frivolous mood of the period. These ideas converged in the early 1920s and coalesced at the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris. The exposition gave Art Deco (derived from *Arts Decoratifs*) wide-ranging exposure outside the architectural and design community, which had been experimenting with the style for years prior to the exposition.[21]

Art Deco spread across the United States during the mid- to late-1920s, rapidly becoming the style of choice for company headquarters, hotels, apartment buildings, and civic structures. Business and commercial interests in the United States especially liked Art Deco because it expressed progress and modern efficiency. The style also produced distinctive architectural images that businesses could employ to create equally distinct corporate images in a period of increased marketing and advertising. The Chrysler Building (1928-1930; National Historic Landmark), constructed after the completion of the Barclay-Vesey Building, is an excellent

[20] McAlester, Virginia and Lee, *A Field Guide to American Houses.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002, p.465.
[21] Gelernter, Mark: *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context.* Haanover: University of New England Press, 1999, pp. 241-242.

example of Art Deco architecture creating a distinctive corporate image. The building, designed by William Van Alen, employed ornamentation alluding to the products sold by Chrysler, such as stylized gargoyles meant to look like hood ornaments. The building's metal cap and spire project a sense of energy and movement.[22]

There are numerous extant examples of Art Deco skyscrapers in major cities throughout the United States. In Chicago, the thirty-seven story 1927-1929 Palmolive Building (designated a Chicago landmark in 2000 and listed in the National Register in 2003) was constructed as the corporate headquarters for Palmolive soap. The building features setbacks and vertical massing while employing vocabulary from the Art Deco idiom. The Bullocks Wilshire Department Store (listed in the National Register in 1978), located on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, was constructed in 1929. The department store features a 241-foot tower setback from the base of the building and adorned with vertical piers and copper sheathing. Miami Beach has an extensive collection of Art Deco buildings that have been recognized in the form of local historic districts: Espanola Way, Collins / Washington Avenues, Museum, and Flamingo Park; these local districts merged to form the Miami Beach Architectural District (listed in the National Register in 1979), which is also known as the Miami Beach Art Deco District.

The Niagara Hudson (Niagara Mohawk) Building

The Niagara Hudson Building's construction was first announced in August of 1930. Construction of a new office building and service complex was described as a way to improve the functioning of the company by centralizing office and service functions at one location, where the gasworks had been located since the 1840s when Erie Boulevard was the Erie Canal. In addition, construction of a $3-million facility was seen as a way to help put Syracusans to work on its construction and to create a feeling of optimism at the beginning of the Great Depression.[23]

In its first incarnation, the main building was to be five stories and would house all office functions of the company. Service buildings would be constructed in other parts of the site, including a wing immediately adjacent to the office building and set parallel to the bend of Erie Boulevard at the western end of the office building. The buildings would be "of modern design."[24] One hint of what the final building would be like was described in the *Syracuse Herald* article of August 1930 as follows: "Special attention will be given to the lighting installation, which will be one of the finest in the country."[25]

[22] Ibid, p. 24.
[23] *An Uncommon History*
[24] *Syracuse Herald,* August 17, 1930.
[25] Ibid.

In February of 1931, the *Syracuse Herald* reported that final plans were nearing completion, under the supervision of Syracuse architect Melvin King. Bley & Lyman, a firm out of Buffalo, were listed as consulting architects but they had designed other structures for the company around this time and it is thought that the design came out of their office. In fact, the list of projects on an inventory of Bley & Lyman's work includes "Syracuse Lighting Company" from 1930[26] but there is no comparable entry in Melvin King's inventory.

The newspaper article of 1931 described a ten-story building that could be extended upward in the future if needed and referred to the building as being in the "daylight" style of architecture,[27] likely due to the fact that what is now called Art Deco had not yet been named as a formal style. In some architectural descriptions, "daylight" referred to the large expanses of glass curtain walls that would have provided abundant light to the interior, a description more commonly applied to concrete- or steel-frame buildings and warehouses of the period, and one where glass walls would have been apparent than in the final design of the Niagara Hudson Building.

The office building as built is seven stories, and as originally stated in the newspaper articles of the day, the use of lighting as an integral feature of the design is indeed one of the most important features of the Niagara Hudson Building. This feature was the source of many comments by members of the public and newspaper reporters at the time of the building's opening. On the exterior, concealed lighting was used to highlight the chrome, black glass and brick construction materials, as well as the winged figured called The Spirit of Light. On the interior, new types of lighting were used in signs and show windows which were used to advertise new electrical appliances.

It is a feature that distinguishes it from other Art Deco buildings of the period. In the case of the Niagara Hudson building,

> Many kinds of lighting were used. Helium tubes supplemented more conventional incandescent lamps in dozens of locations. Floodlights concealed in the façade singled out the helmeted head of "The Spirit of Light" sculpture on the tower, while others skimmed the statue's wings as they swept their beams into the sky. But the most unusual feature was in the corners and the center panels of the tower.
>
> These narrow, vertical rooms were walled with tons of heat-resistant glass. They contained thousands of watts of floodlights, making them glow at night like enormous jewels. The panels got so hot that the first drops of an evening rainstorm sizzled when they hit the glass.[28]

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[26] Buffaloah.com
[27] *Syracuse Herald,* February 24, 1931.
[28] *An Uncommon History.*

The complex opened to great fanfare in 1932, when it was described as being in the "offset" style of architecture. Among the guests were both Syracuse architect Melvin King and Duane Lyman of the Buffalo architectural firm, Bley & Lyman. Paul A. Schoellkopf. of Buffalo, president of the Niagara Hudson Power Corporation, was also in attendance A Syracuse *Herald American* article of July 10, 1932, described the building as

> one of the most magnificent office buildings in America and surpassing in scenic beauty any structure in Central New York, [and one that], because of its many new features, has attracted the interest of leading architects and utility company heads in all parts of the country....Standing out prominently in the day time as a conspicuous example of the architect's art, the building shines in even greater splendor at night by reason of the latest and most advanced system of illumination.[29]

Another reporter described it as "one of the most beautiful and well appointed office buildings in the country, and pictures of the structure have been viewed -with intense interest by utility heads and others throughout the country. Many architects and engineers visited Syracuse while the building was under construction to study the many new materials used to give a striking demonstration of the utility's chief products — electricity and gas....Now that the building has been completed scores of others from various parts of the country are expected to come here solely tor an inspection of the structure."[30]

While offices were described as simple in design and decoration but light and airy, the elevator lobby of the Erie Boulevard entrance, the main access point of the building, was one of the most highly decorated spaces within the building.

It is illuminated by indirect lighting reflected from what a reporter of the day called its "sawtooth" ceiling.[31] Elevator doors are made of stainless steel and the elevators were decorated with aluminum and vermillion, the company colors. Four plaques, depicting the main activities of the utility, decorate the lobby. To the east of the lobby was the main customer service room, with places of bill paying and questions, and nearby were two model kitchens demonstrating the use of gas and electric appliances. Today, this room has been reworked as an auditorium, respecting many of the original features of the customer service center. The remainder of both the main building and the west wing (known as Buildings A and B, respectively), are populated by undecorated office space, a condition that dates from the opening of the building.

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[29] *Syracuse Herald,* July 10, 1932.
[30] Ibid., July 11, 1932.
[31] Ibid., July 10, 1932.

Melvin L. King and Bley & Lyman, Architects

It is not clear that Melvin King was the principal architect of the building. In one of the articles regarding attendees to the Niagara Hudson Building's opening, King is described as an official of the Chamber of Commerce but not as the architect. In the same article, Duane Lyman, of the firm of Bley & Lyman, is described as consulting architect.[32]

The website *Syracuse Then and Now* states that Melvin L. King lived from 1868 to 1946. He was born in Onondaga County and joined the architectural firm of James H. Kirby in Syracuse in 1885. Four years later, he began working in the office of Archimedes Russell, one of Syracuse's most prominent architect of the period, and became a partner in 1906. "Following Russell's death in 1915, King practiced under his own name until 1932 when his son Harry joined the firm as partner. In 1945, father and son were joined by f. Curtis King, Melvin King's nephew." The firm operates to this day under the name of King and King and includes his descendants, making it perhaps the only architectural firm in the state that can claim five generations of one family as principals.[33]

Bley & Lyman

Lawrence H. Bley was born in the Buffalo suburb of Hamburg in 1884, where he resided throughout his life. He partnered with Williams Lansing and Duane Lyman, and after the departure of Williams Lansing, Bley and Lyman completed numerous notable works around Buffalo and Upstate New York. Lawrence Bley died in 1939.

Duane S. Lyman had a long and prominent architectural career in Buffalo and has been dubbed the "Dean of Western New York Architecture" due to the prominence of many of his projects. He was born in Lockport, New York, in 1886 and studied architecture at Yale University's Graduate Sheffield Scientific School, graduating in 1908. He lived in Europe for several years before returning to Buffalo on the eve of World War I. He practiced architecture for a short time with Lansing and Bley, but during the War, Lyman left the firm and served as a Major in the Ordinance Department. After 1920, the new firm was called Bley & Lyman, which existed until 1938. After that, Duane Lyman & Associates was established.

Lansing, Bley, and Lyman worked primarily in Classical Revival styles, and over their long career, the various firms designed some of Buffalo's most important buildings. In their early years, Lansing, Bley & Lyman are credited with, among others, E. & B. Holmes Machinery Company Building [(1910-1912) NR Listing 2009], Children's Hospital Nursing Home (1911), Notre Dame de Lourdes School (1913), the Buffalo Tennis and Squash Club [(1916) NR Listed 2008], and the Delaware

[32] Ibid., July 11, 1932.
[33] Syracuse Then and Now

Court Building (1916). They were also credited with several residential buildings in and around Buffalo.

After Lyman's stint in World War I, William Lansing retired from practice and the firm became known as Bley & Lyman. During the 1920s and 1930's, Bley & Lyman assumed the role of one of Buffalo's leading architectural firms. Among their works from this period were Buffalo's Saturn Club [(1922) NR Listed 2005], 800 West Ferry St. [(1929) (commissioned by Darwin R. Martin, son of Larkin executive Darwin D. Martin], the Vars Building (1929), the Edwin M. & Emily S. Johnston House [(1934) NR Listed 1997], the Buffalo Federal Court House (1936), Cazenovia NY's Old Trees [(1937) NR Listed 1991], and the Eckhardt's Department Store (1939) in Buffalo.

Throughout their work together, the firm demonstrated the ability to switch between the Revival styles popular in the early-twentieth century to the emerging Art Deco and Art Moderne styles. The firm collaborated with architect Melvin L. King in 1932 and produced the Niagara Mohawk Building in Syracuse NY, one of the nation's finest examples of Art Deco style

After Bley's death in 1939, Lyman continued to design under his new firm Duane Lyman & Associates, maintaining his range and flexibility to adapt to the emerging styles and tastes of his clients is evident in his body of work from the recent past. Lyman died in 1966.[34]

[34] Buffaloah.com

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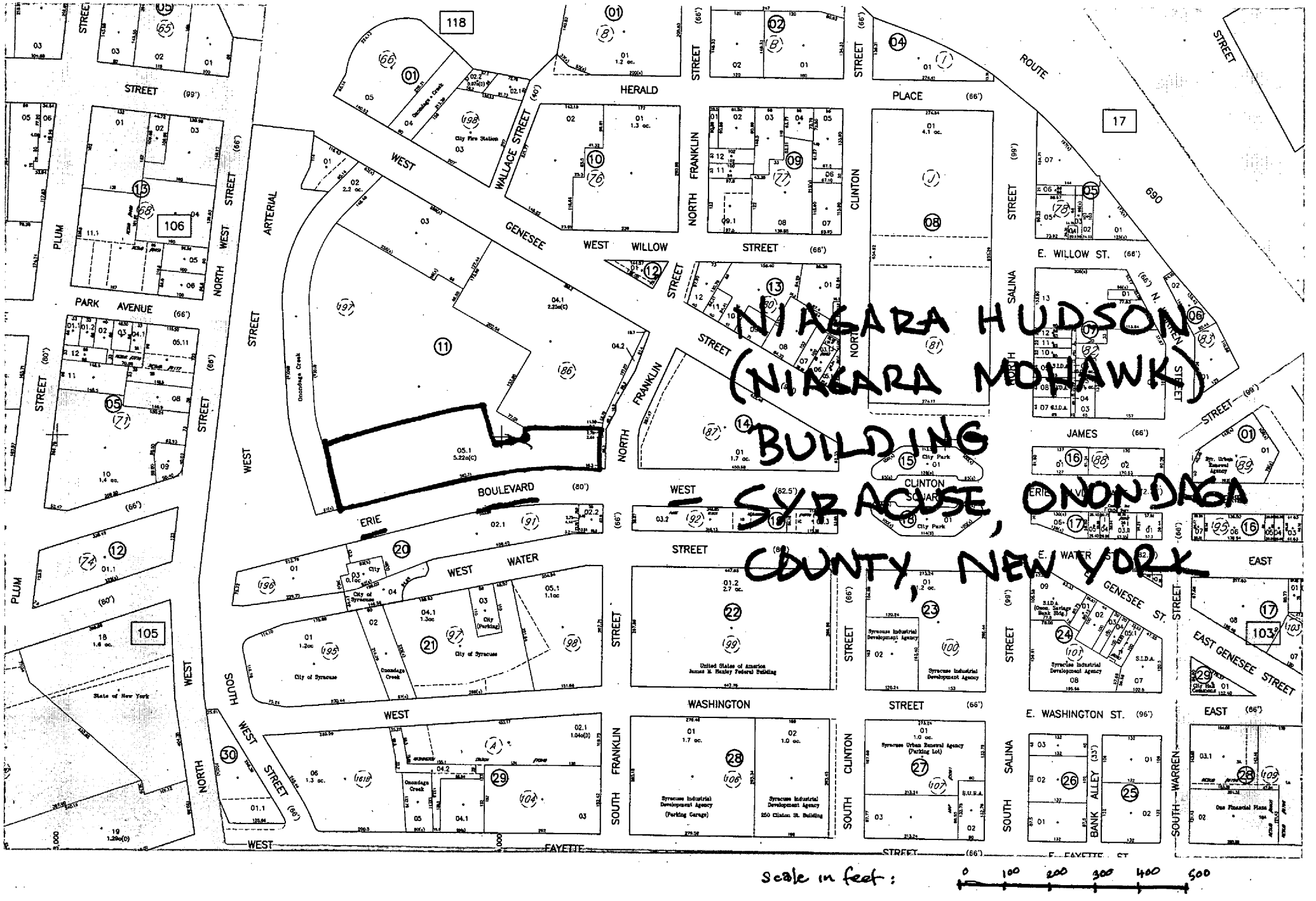
Syracusethenandnow.org.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property boundary is outlined on the attached map.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes the boundary of the two historic buildings that are adjacent on this property. The line has been drawn to exclude a non-historic addition that was appended to Building A circa 1970.


NIAGARA HUDSON
(NIAGARA MOHAWK)
BUILDING
SYRACUSE, ONONDAGA
COUNTY, NEW YORK
Scale in feet:
0 100 200 300 400 500
HERALD
PLACE
ROUTE
17
690
WEST GENESEE
WEST WILLOW
STREET
E. WILLOW ST.
PARK AVENUE
PLUM
NORTH WEST STREET
ARTERIAL
WALLACE STREET
NORTH FRANKLIN
CLINTON
SALINA
JAMES
CLINTON SQUARE
ERIE BOULEVARD
WEST WATER
STREET
E. WATER
GENESEE ST.
EAST GENESEE STREET
EAST
WASHINGTON
E. WASHINGTON ST.
SOUTH WEST STREET
SOUTH FRANKLIN
SOUTH CLINTON
SOUTH SALINA
BANK ALLEY
SOUTH WARREN
WEST FAYETTE STREET
E. FAYETTE ST.
City Fire Station
Onondaga Creek
City of Syracuse
City (Parking)
City Park
State of New York
United States of America James M. Hanley Federal Building
Syracuse Industrial Development Agency
Syracuse Urban Renewal Agency (Parking Lot)
Syracuse Industrial Development Agency (Parking Garage)
Syracuse Industrial Development Agency 250 Clinton St. Building
S.U.R.A.
S.I.D.A.
One Financial Plaza
118
106
105
103

Company History prepared by:

Michael A. Stanton
National Grid
300 Erie Boulevard West
Syracuse, New York 13202

Photographs

Photographer: Michael A. Stanton
National Grid
300 Erie Boulevard West
Syracuse, New York 13202

Date: October 2009, March 2010.

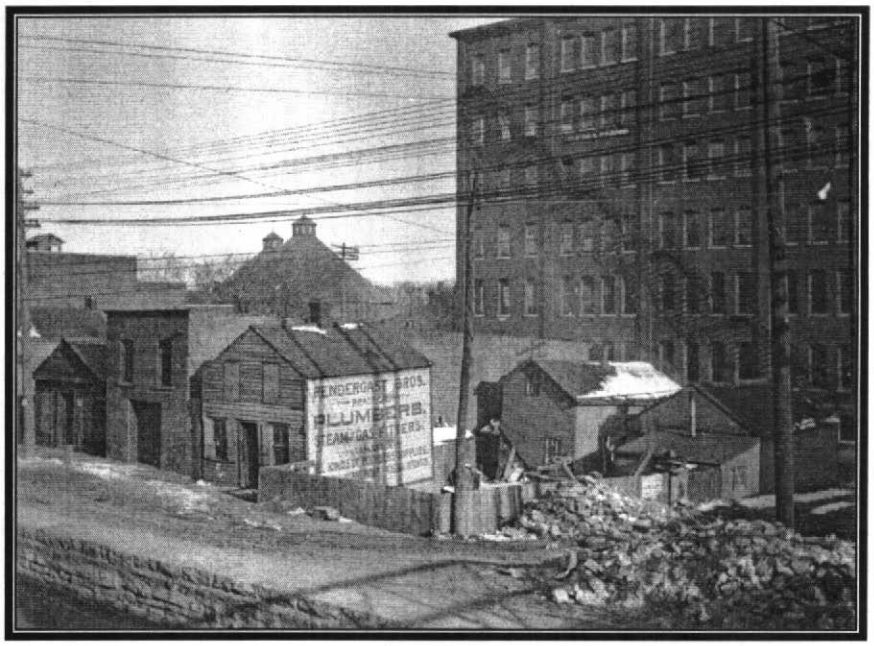
Tiff Files: CD-R of .tiff files on file at
National Park Service
Washington, DC, and

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Peebles Island
PO Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

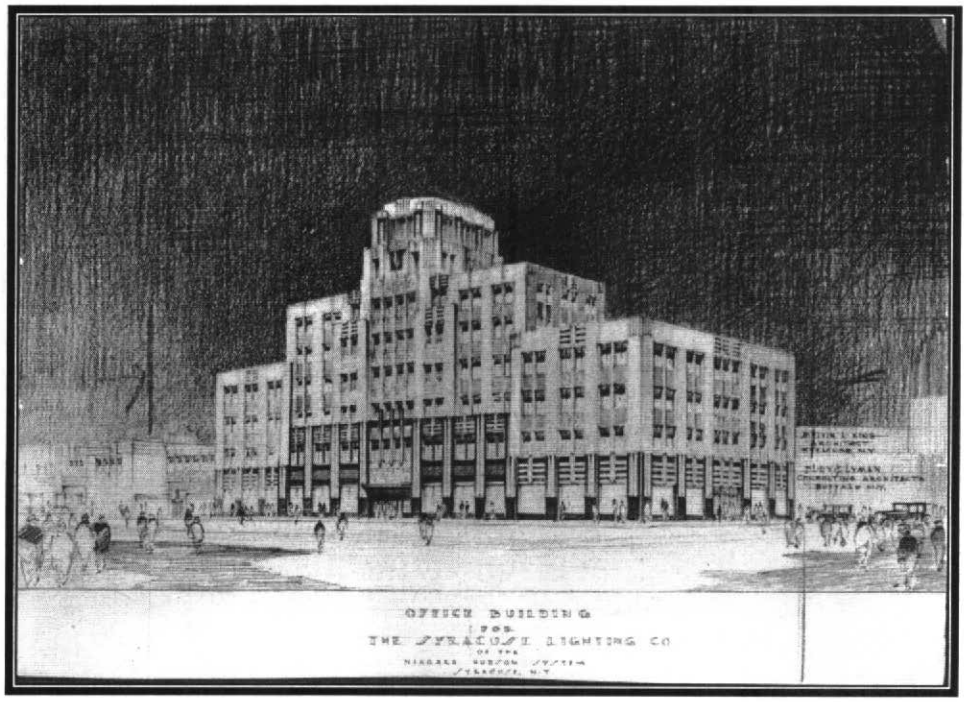
1. Exterior, A Building Façade, photographer facing north.
2. Exterior, A Building Façade and east elevation, photographer facing northwest.
3. Exterior, A Building tower detail, photographer facing northwest.
4. Exterior, A Building tower detail, photographer facing north.
5. Exterior, A Building east entrance, photographer facing west.
6. Exterior, B Building, photographer facing northwest.
7. Exterior, A Building rear, photographer facing southwest.
8. Exterior, A Building, façade detail, photographer facing north.
9. Exterior, A Building, façade detail, photographer facing north.
10. Interior, A Building lobby, photographer facing west.
11. Interior, A Building, lobby, elevator doors, photographer facing northwest.
12. Interior, lobby mural, "Gas," photographer facing north (west of elevators).
13. Interior, lobby mural, "Generation," photographer facing north (east of elevators).
14. Interior, lobby mural, Illumination," photographer facing south (west of entry).
15. Interior, lobby mural, "Transmission," photographer facing south (east of entry).
16. Interior, Auditorium doors to Franklin Street, photographer facing east.
17. Interior, Auditorium detail "Customers Service" sign, photographer facing north.
18. Interior, upper floor of A Building, photographer facing east.
19. Exterior, south and east elevations after dark, green lighting scheme, photographer facing northwest.

NIAGARA HUDSON (NIAGARA MOHAWK) BUILDING
SYRACUSE, ONONDAGA COUNTY, NEW YORK

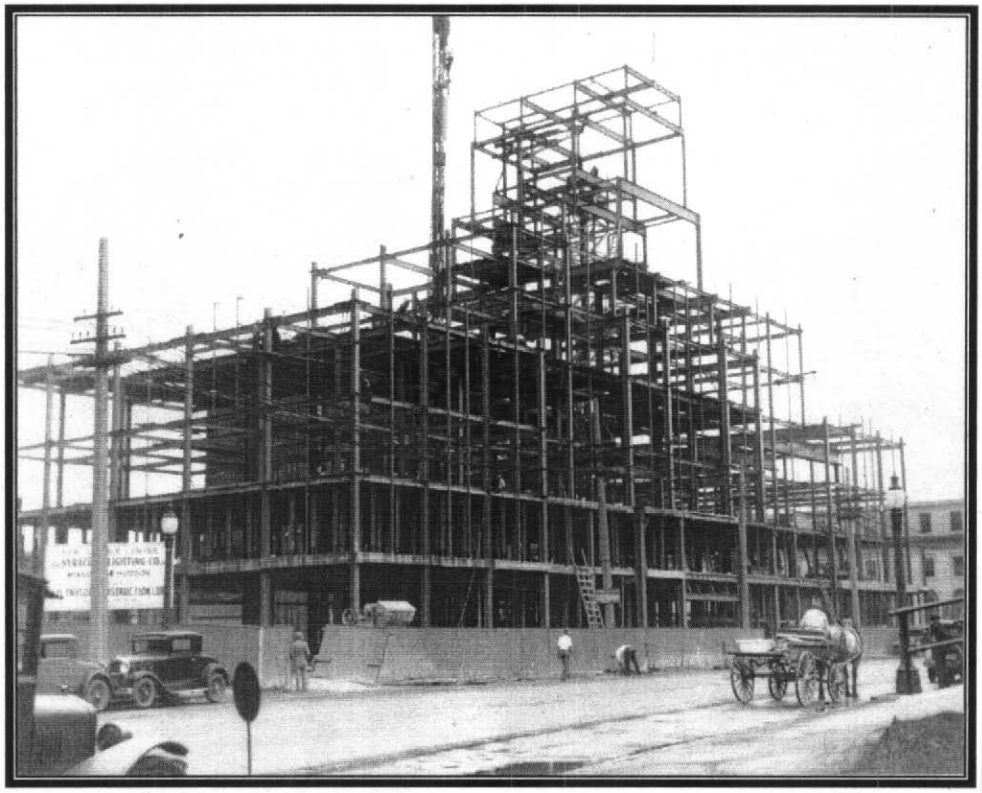
NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION APPENDIX:
HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS



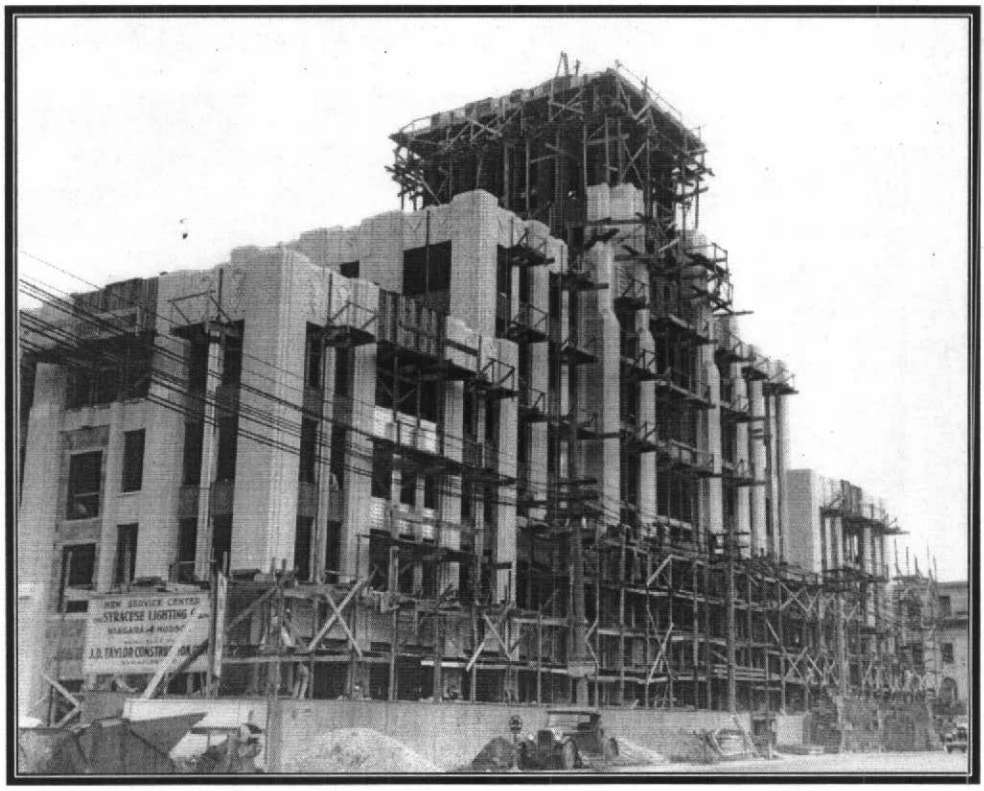
Site prior to construction, with Erie Canal wall in foreground, gasholders in background.



Early architectural rendering.

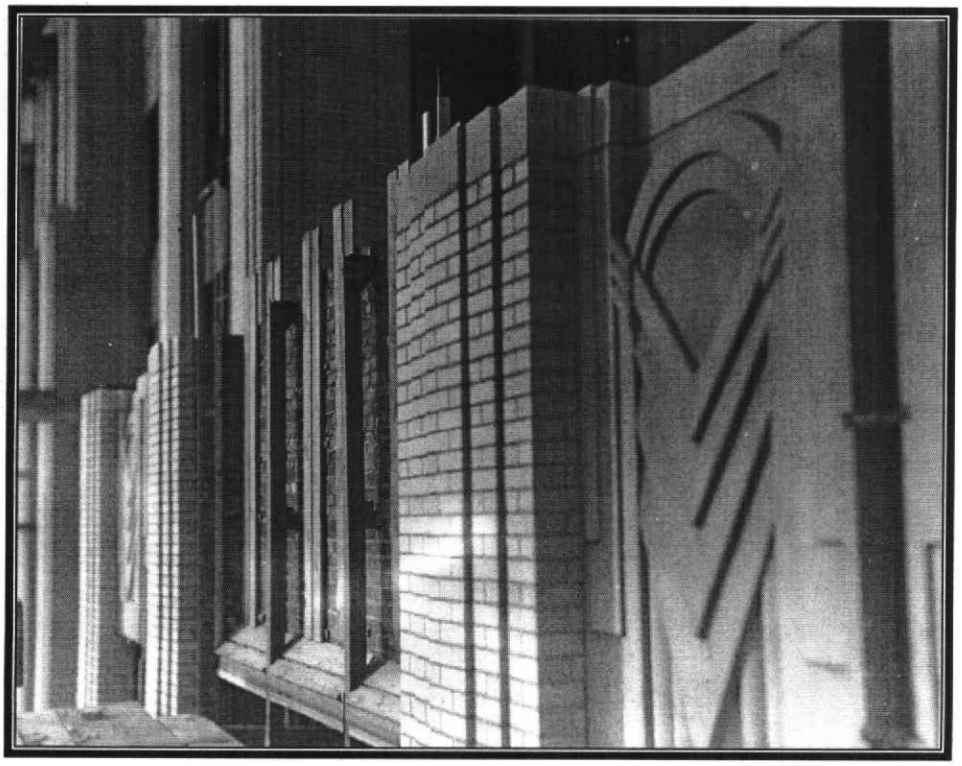


Steel framing. Horse and buggy still in use, c.1931.

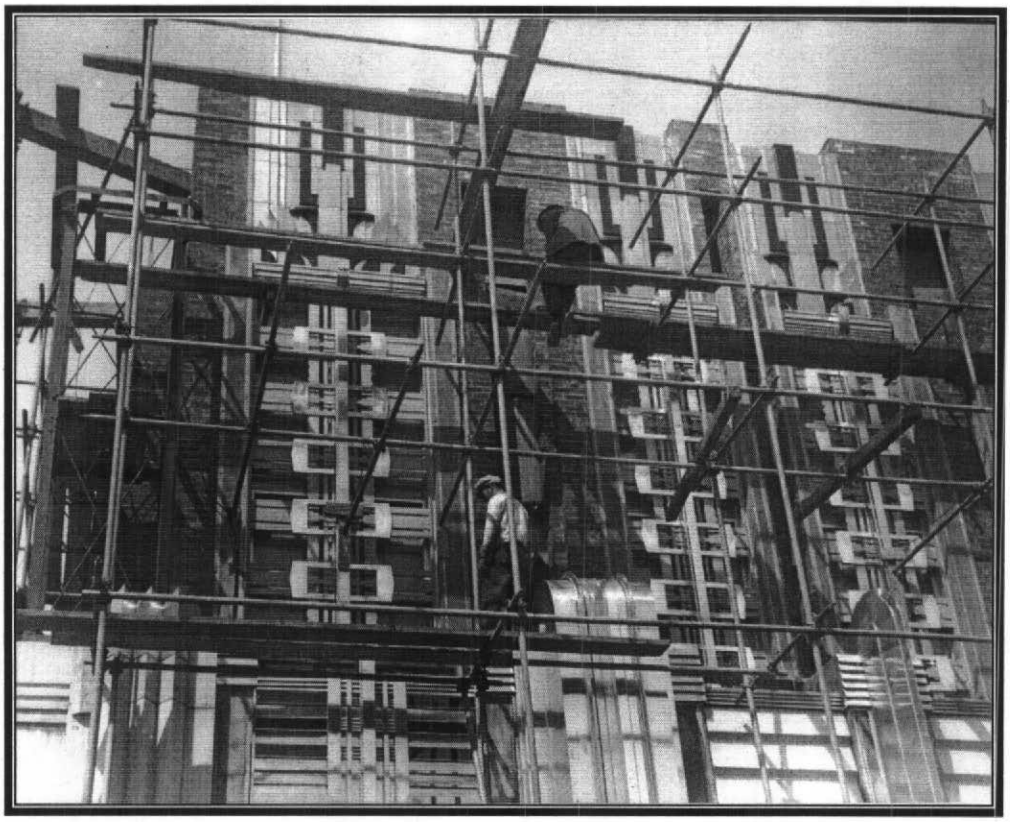


Similar vantage point to above with face brick and concrete Art Deco details in place.

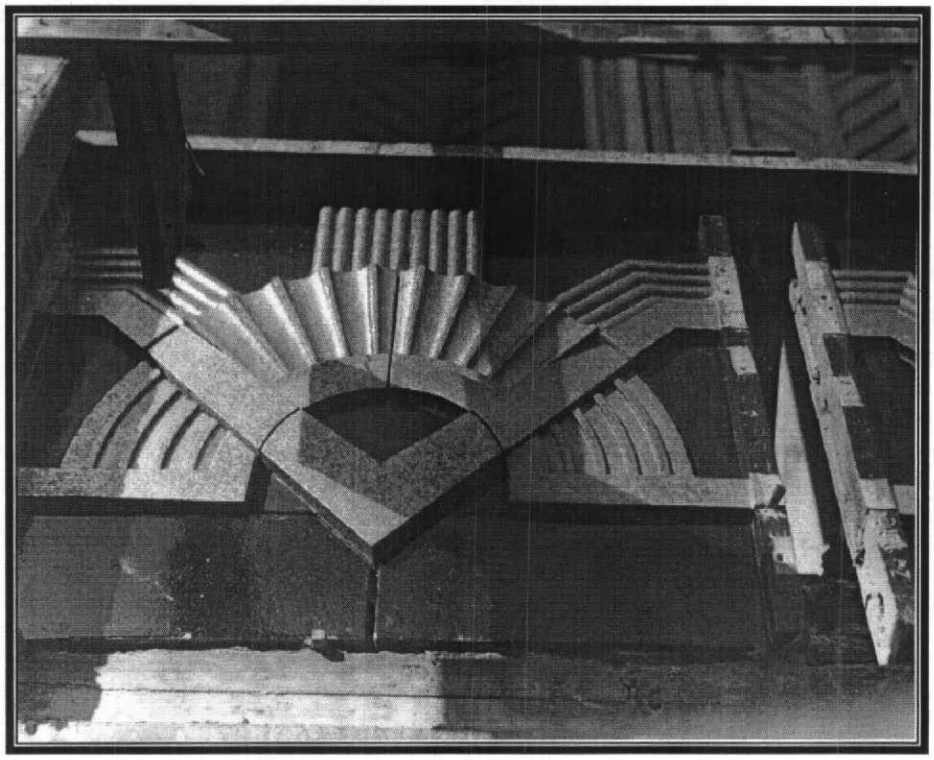
Rear elevation of main building (now partly obscured by later building).



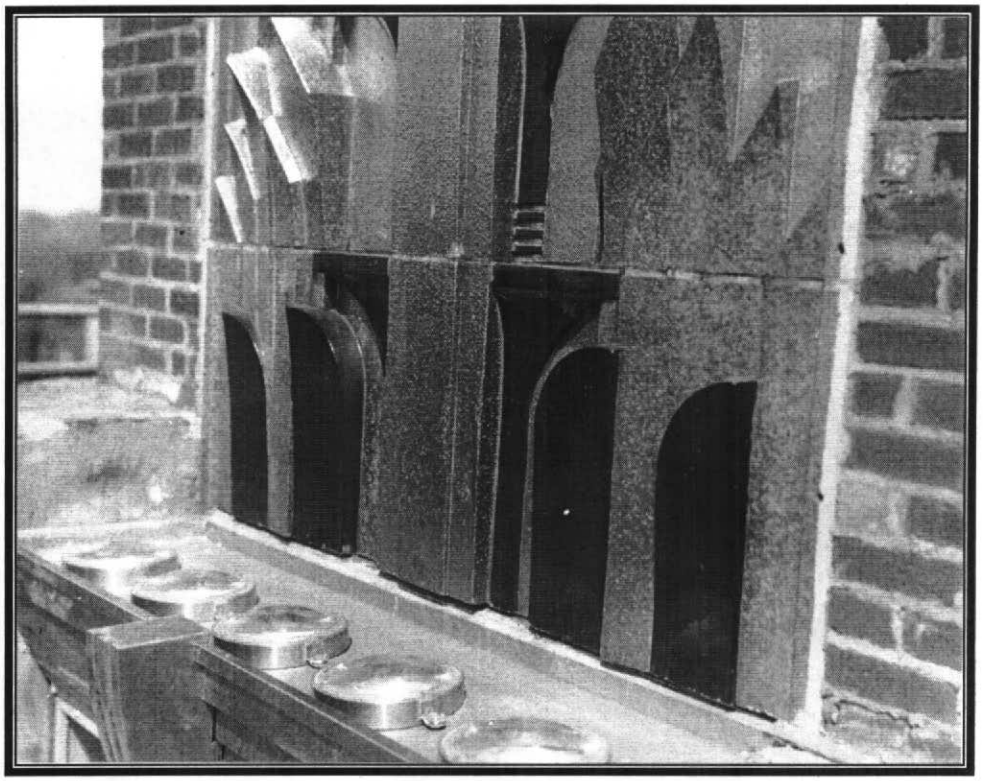
Parapet wall with Art Deco detailing, face brick on piers, and area where hidden lighting will be installed between piers.



Side elevation of tower. Common brick areas will be encased in glass for hidden lighting.

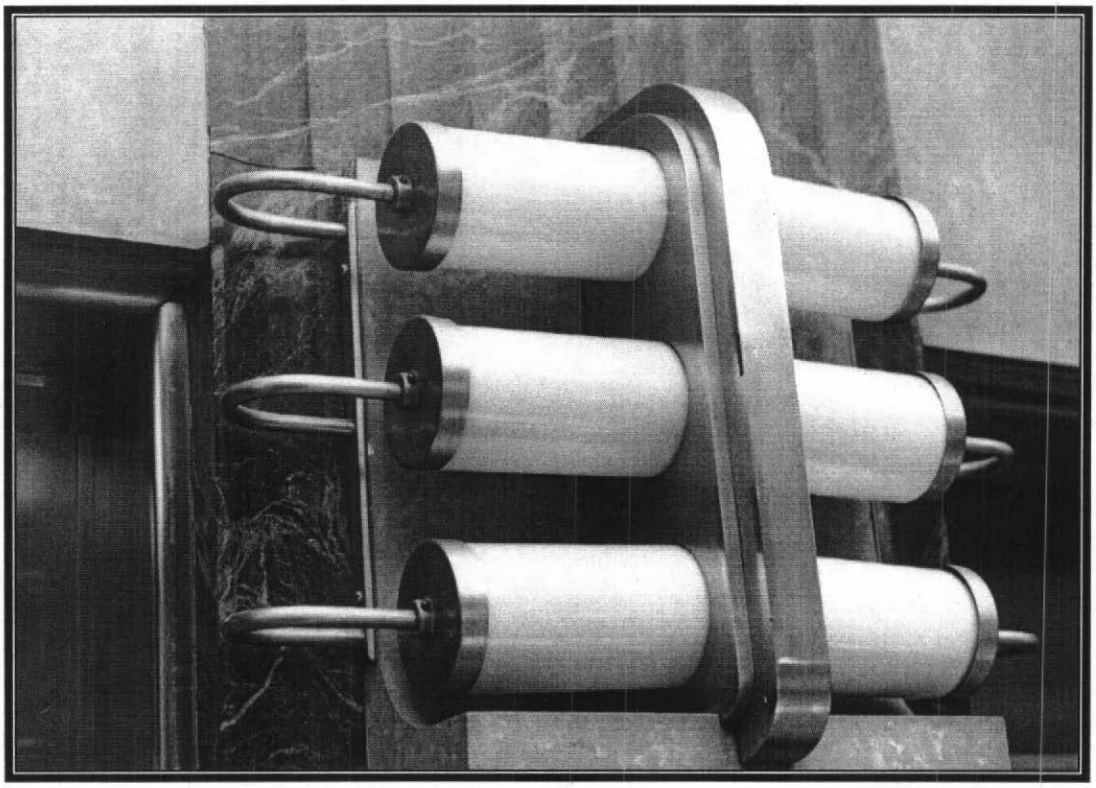


Art Deco detailing at center of main elevation.



Art Deco detail with hidden lighting.

Entry portico. Area at top showing common brick will house hidden lighting as will area immediately above canopy.

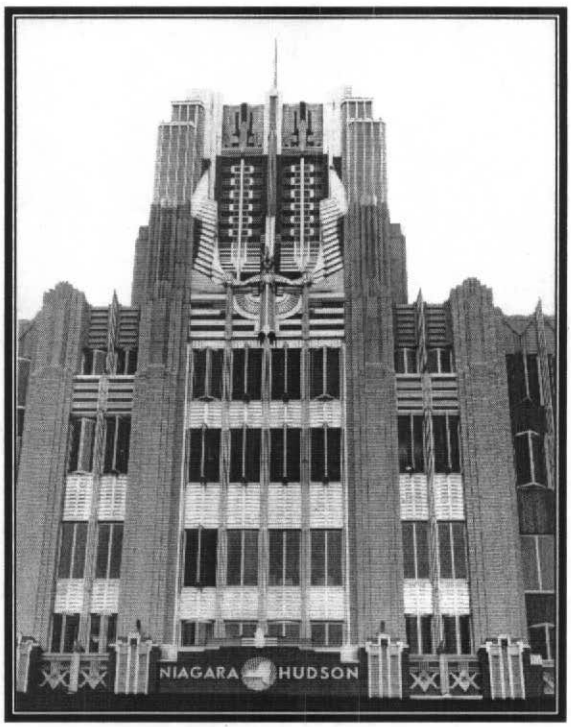


Interior lobby detail.

"Customers Service" Area east of main lobby. Now Auditorium.

Main Building (A), 1936.

B Building, 1936.



Center Tower, with Spirit of Light.

Historic night view.

NIAGARA MOHAWK
NIAGARA MOHAWK POWER

Welcome
Visitors:
Please sign in at Security Desk.
Employees must wear National Grid identification.
nationalgrid

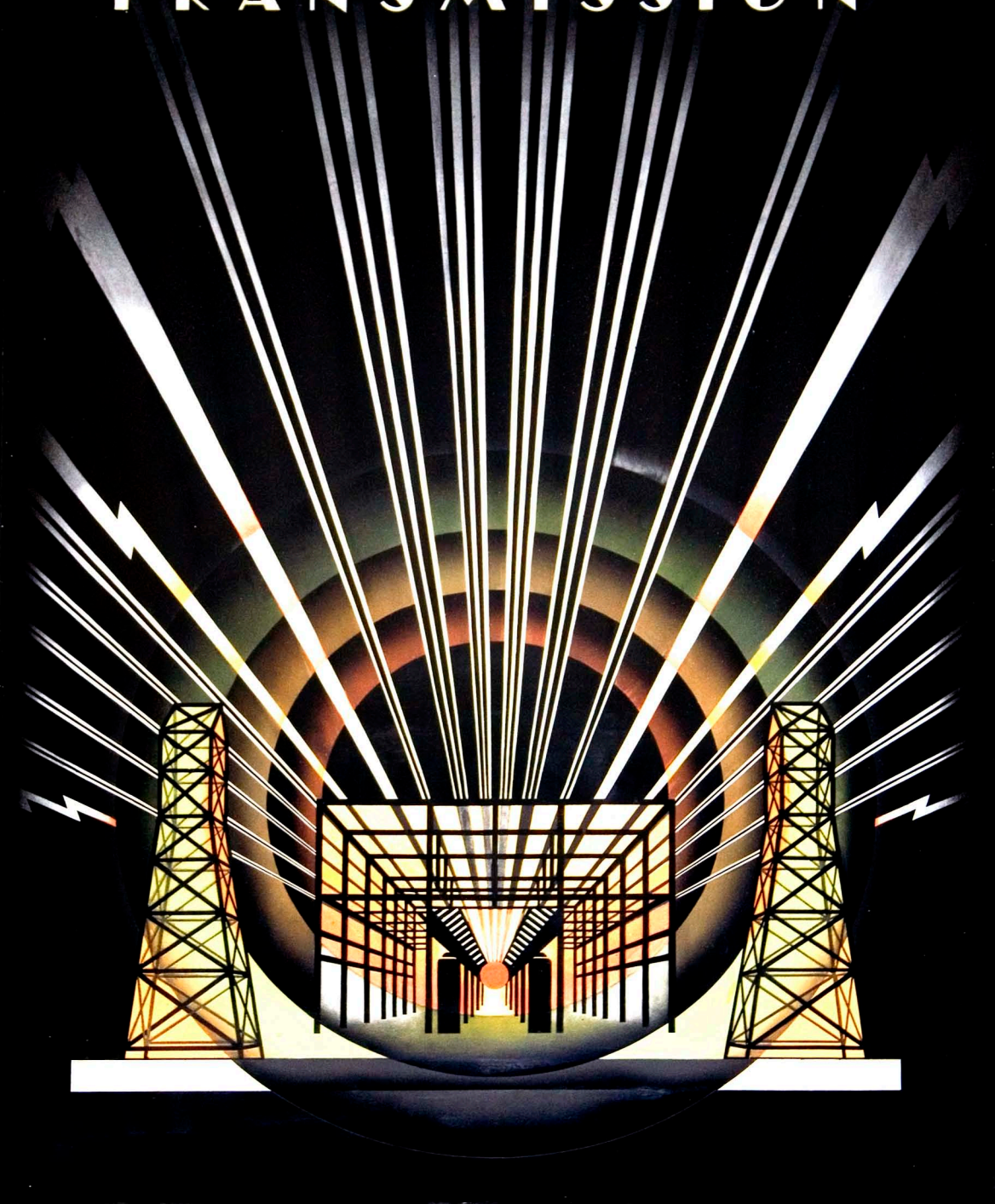
SECURITY
CHECK POINT

GAS

GENERATION

ILLUMINATION

TRANSMISSION



EXIT

EXIT

CUSTOMERS
SERVICE

EXIT
EXIT