

Downtown New York Begins to Undergo Radical Transformation

Battery to Get Superblocks and Towers

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

A series of huge holes in the ground between the Battery and Brooklyn Bridge mark the start of a radical transformation for old New York.

Within the next two years, at least nine new skyscrapers and five new superblocks will be built in the heart of lower Manhattan, in addition to the 16-acre World Trade Center on the Hudson River and the 15-acre Brooklyn Bridge Southwest urban renewal project on the East River.

Other large sites adjacent to the Trade Center and along the East River are in the negotiation stage.

Most of the strip along the Battery, from the Custom House to Coenties Slip, is in a state of demolition and construction. For half the distance along the East River from the Battery to the Brooklyn Bridge there will be a virtual clean sweep of old for new. The southern tip of Manhattan, the city's most famous face, looks like a disaster area.

The Age of the Sill

To fanciers of old New York, comparisons to a disaster area are uncomfortably apt. Lower Manhattan has been the last stronghold of the small, historic structures that served the early-19th-century city's sailing age. Many of these buildings have been in continuous commercial use for over a century and a quarter.

To members of the real estate and downtown business community, however, the new buildings mean prosperity and progress. The downtown financial district was in the throes of deterioration and gradual abandonment until Chase Manhattan reversed the trend with its striking new headquarters at 1 Chase Manhattan Plaza in 1961.

But quite apart from nostalgia or profit, this battle between past and present represents physical change unparalleled in size since the original Wall Street building boom. Old streets, old buildings and old associations are succumbing with sweeping finality to the scale and style of the 20th century.

Success or Failure?

Whether this is good or bad, and whether the combined efforts of the City Planning Commission, the Landmarks Preservation Commission, street and traffic agencies and the private business community have struck the best balance between economics and urban design, are being debated in planning circles.

As usual, New York is looked on as a success story or a horror story, depending on which side of the planning controversy one sits.

The new buildings are a success to those for whom they mean the economic rejuvenation of downtown. They are a failure to those who see them as a repetition of the pattern of post-war commercial construction of standard glass and brick boxes in midtown. Preservationists de-



The New York Times (by Carl T. Gossett Jr.)

Tip of Lower Manhattan will have 34-story office tower on site of parking lot just before Custom House, which is block-square building at left. Just south of this planned tower, a new 23-story Seamen's Church Institute

will also rise. Near lower right, 70 old buildings were razed to make two superblocks that will have a 50-story tower, a 22-story one and a third tower. Picture was made while snow still covered Battery Park, at left.

plore the wholesale wiping out of historic streets and buildings.

These are the changes. Beginning at Bowling Green, facing Battery Park, construction is to begin on a 34-story, block-square tower with plazas at 24 State Street, bounded by State, Pearl, Bridge and Whitehall Streets.

The black aluminum and blue glass-faced building in New York's familiar commercial curtain wall style will jostle the ornate stone Custom House with its rich baroque statuary directly to the north. With the

construction of the World Trade Center, the fate of the Custom House hangs in the balance.

The new 24 State Street Tower will be built by Rudin & Rose, with Emery Roth & Sons as architects.

Institutional Skyscraper

South of the new skyscraper, at the corner of Pearl Street, construction has already started on the new Seamen's Church Institute at 15 State Street. The old building, at 25 South Street, is rumored to have been sold to Uris Brothers, which neither

confirms nor denies the purchase.

The new Seamen's Building, by Eggers and Higgins, will be a 23-story structure in what might be called institutional skyscraper style. It will have a projecting stair tower topped by a lighted cross, and walls of textured brick and exposed concrete. It will stand next to a diminutive landmark, the early 19th-century Watson house, now the Mission of Our Lady of the Rosary, with a small Georgian-style church.

Across Whitehall Street a

massive transformation of old New York is in progress. On the remains of three rare one of the largest sites assembled privately for new construction since the war, bounded by Whitehall, Water, South Streets and Coenties Slip, about 70 small, old buildings have been demolished to make way for three large new buildings on two new superblocks.

Many dated from the 19th century, and the last holdout was the much-publicized red brick house of Mrs. Maggie Petersen, who lost her fight with the future to the developers.

The bulldozer also disposed of the remains of three rare Georgian houses that the city had hoped to move.

The owners of the site, the investment concern of Atlas McGrath, acquired the land to build a new headquarters for the New York Stock Exchange at the same time that the city was preparing to declare the area an urban renewal project for the same purpose.

Because the city was then unable to purchase the land, the

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urban renewal plan was dropped. Since then the Stock Exchange has also dropped its option.

The entire area, with street frontage of 366 feet by almost 800 feet (the length of a Park Avenue block is 200 feet), is being privately developed by Atlas-McGrath.

One of the city's biggest new buildings will rise from the ruins of sailing-age New York to occupy the southern section of the site, completing the transformation of the Battery.

Called 1 New York Plaza, it will be bounded by Whitehall, South, Broad and Water Streets. A new superblock has been created by closing off part of Front Street and all of historic Moore Street.

The Chase Manhattan Bank, which has already outgrown its own quarters at 1 Chase Manhattan Plaza, has signed a record-breaking, \$300-million lease for this building, the largest business lease in the city's history. The 50-story structure, which will stand partly on the site of four-and five-story 19th-century brick buildings, will have a small banking pavilion on an open plaza. The architect is William Lescage.

The northern section of the site will have two building on a superblock made by closing part of Front Street. The western portion has been leased by Atlas-McGrath to Manufacturers Hanover Trust, which is putting up its own building at 115 Broad Street, by Carson, Lundin & Shaw. Construction for the eastern portion is still undetermined.

Park Is Re-Sited

The Manufacturers Hanover Trust building will be a 22-story, brick-faced structure, with unusual massing and window patterns, to serve as an operations center rather than as a headquarters office.

At the northern boundary of the Atlas-McGrath land, the city has re-sited Jeanette Park, eliminating Coenties Slip West. Across the street is the old Seamen's Church Institute. Talk among real estate brokers is that surrounding properties are being sought to make another huge construction site.

Three short blocks farther up



The New York Times March 27, 1967
Map shows new building patterns in lower Manhattan

South Street another superblock ity and urban richness to the has been assembled by Uris New York scene. The current Brothers, and the old structures, development of lower Manhat- including one of the city's best- tan almost eliminates that con- preserved rows of early 19th- trast and continuity in the area- century Greek Revival build- where it has been most histori- ings, have been demolished. cally pertinent and best-pre- served.

Construction is beginning on a 24-story, two-block-square building for the First National City Bank, to called 111 Wall Street, on a lease-back arrangement with Uris. It will be glass-walled, and the architects will be Emery Roth & Sons.

The site is bounded by Front, Wall, South Streets and Gouverneur Lane. One of New York's old waterfront streets, Jones Lane, was eliminated by the city to make the Uris superblock possible.

Across the street, at 100 Wall, the Roth firm is proceeding with a smaller but still substantial commercial building for another investment builder.

Opposite the First National City Bank site, on the west side of Front Street, a row of four- and five-story brick Greek Revival buildings of about 1837 still stands, against the dramatic backdrop of soaring financial district skyscrapers.

It is the contrast between old and new, the flavor of Georgian brick next to glass towers, that architects and historians believe give a sense of historic continu-

ity and urban richness to the New York scene. The current development of lower Manhattan almost eliminates that contrast and continuity in the area where it has been most historically pertinent and best-preserved.

The controversy about the new development is basically one of preservation and planning. Critics of the Landmarks Preservation Commission point out that the commission has designated none of the commercial Greek Revival heritage in this part of lower Manhattan, including the Fulton Street row being urged for preservation as the South Street Maritime Museum. The tacit belief is that the commission has been powerless against the high real estate values and the interests of the business community.

As the shabby but colorful old structures disappear, the new skyscraper parade is led, in numbers, by the buildings of Emery Roth & Sons, the designers of many of the big commercial buildings that have put their uniform stamp on midtown.

All of the new downtown construction has required zoning variances and street closings by the city to make it possible for investors to build large, profitable structures on the old small

sites. Zoning adjustments have been essential for narrow, irregular streets.

At the same time, the builders have taken advantage of the revised zoning code that gives height bonuses for open ground space. This has resulted in what one architect calls "the usual unnecessary plazas in the wrong places."

The controversy in planning circles centers on whether the city's response to the developers' requests, which has virtually wiped out the area's historic scale and street pattern to make the new commercial superblocks, was the only acceptable course. Off the record, some sentiment within the City Planning Department expresses regret for lost planning opportunities.

These opportunities are described as optimum utilization of a prime part of the city's waterfront, and design coordination of open spaces. Both planners and architects, including some involved in the larger construction, cite the loss of the chance for a smaller, coordinated Rockefeller Center type of complex on the large Atlas-McGrath site. As it stands, buildings are being designed with no knowledge of what their neighbors will be.

The current construction will be largely completed within the next two years. There is agreement on only one point: this is an end, and a beginning, for the old city.