

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



**OPPENHEIMER-GOLDBLATT BROS.  
DEPARTMENT STORE BUILDING**

**4700 S. Ashland Av.**

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**Preliminary and Final Landmark Recommendation adopted  
by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, March 7, 2013**



**CITY OF CHICAGO  
Rahm Emanuel, Mayor**

**Department of Housing and Economic Development  
Andrew J. Mooney, Commissioner**

*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.*

*The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.*

*This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within a designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.*

# **OPPENHEIMER-GOLDBLATT BROS.**

## **DEPARTMENT STORE BUILDING**

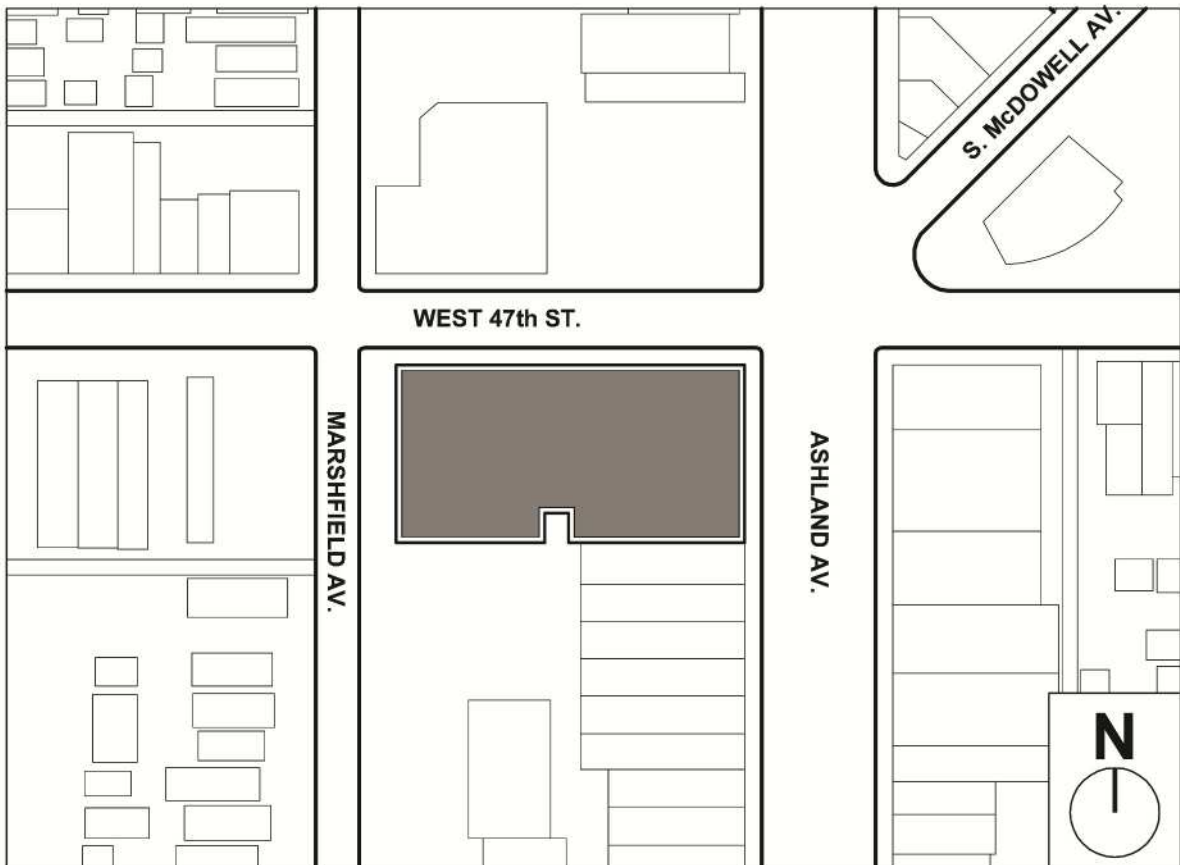
**4700 S. Ashland Av.**

**Built: 1915 (Original Building)**  
**1929 (Addition to the West)**  
**1933 (Added Stories to 1915 Building)**

**Architect: Alfred S. Alschuler**

Chicago's tremendous growth in population and size from the 1870s through the 1920s gave rise to its distinctive patchwork of neighborhoods sprawling outward from Chicago's central business district in the Loop. While the Loop remained the commercial heart of the city, many of Chicago's outlying neighborhoods grew large enough to support their own shopping districts with a range of stores, banks, professional services and theaters conveniently located for local residents. These "cities within the city" were often anchored by at least one large department store building, owned independently or by a chain, which offered a wide range of goods at prices that reflected their middle- and working class neighborhood surroundings.

Built in phases from 1915 to 1933, the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building at 4700 S. Ashland Av. is one of the best-surviving early examples of this significant building type. Each phase of the building was designed by Alfred S. Alschuler, one of Chicago's most prominent early-twentieth century architects whose body of work includes the London Guarantee Building, K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple, the first Goldblatt Bothers Department Store and the Florsheim Shoe Company building, all designated Chicago Landmarks. Alschuler's design for the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building is a late example of the Chicago School, a nationally-important style of commercial architecture. The building is also significant for its association with the Goldblatt Bros., a Chicago department store company that grew into a regional chain by pioneering discount-retailing methods.



Built in phases from 1915 to 1933, the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store is located at the intersection of W. 47th St. and Ashland Avenue in the Back of the Yards neighborhood on Chicago's Southwest Side.

## BUILDING HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION

The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building is located five miles from the Loop on the Southwest Side at the corner of W. 47<sup>th</sup> St. and S. Ashland Av. in the Back of the Yards neighborhood within the larger New City community area. The name “Back of the Yards” refers to the neighborhood’s location south and west, or “back,” of the Union Stock Yards, a conglomeration of livestock trading and meatpacking facilities that once sprawled over 475 acres near Exchange and Halsted streets north of the store’s location. The Stock Yards was one of Chicago’s largest employers from its establishment in 1865 until well into the middle of the twentieth century, and most of its employees lived within walking distance in a group of densely-populated working-class neighborhoods that included, in addition to Back of the Yards, the neighborhoods of Bridgeport, McKinley Park and Canaryville, all collectively known as Packingtown.

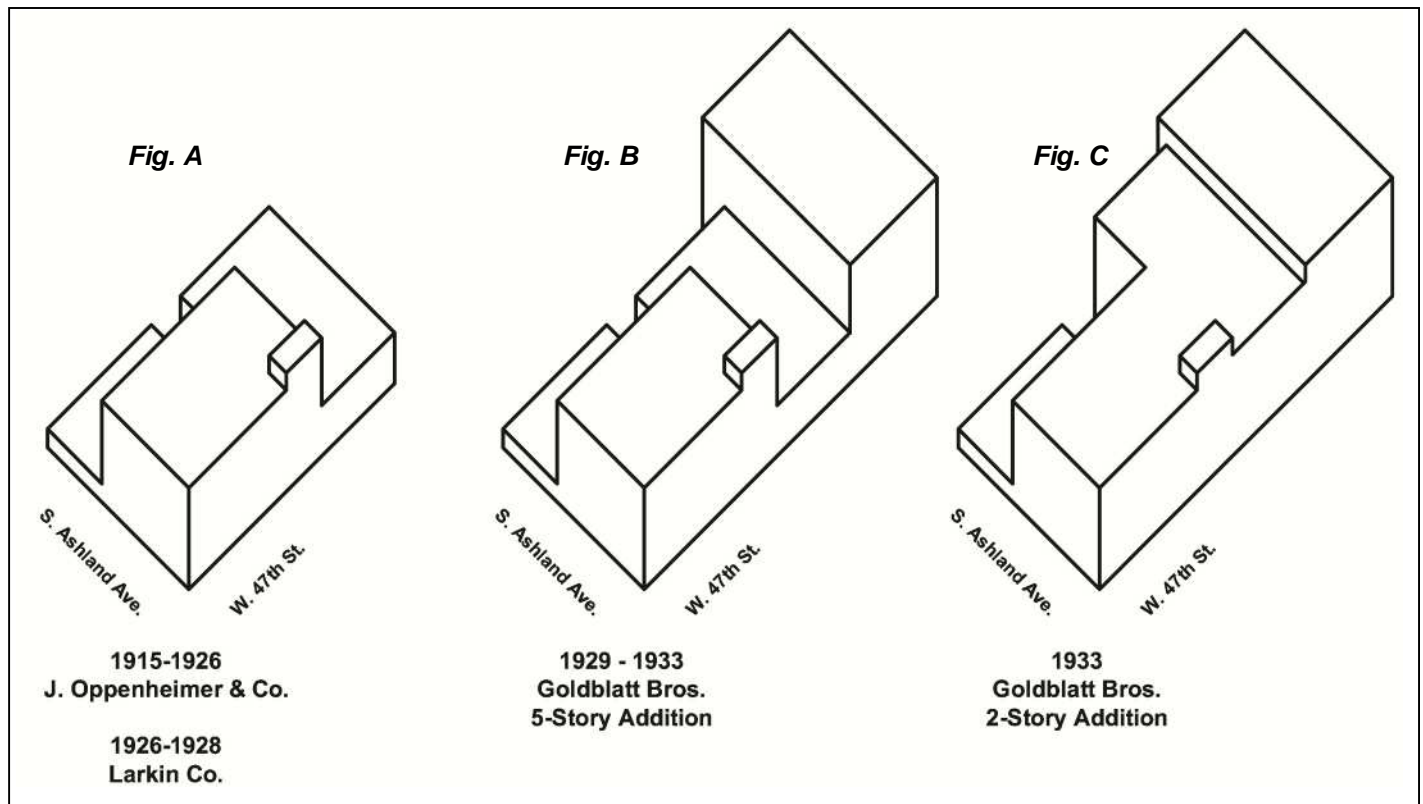
Back of the Yards was first populated by German and Irish immigrants, yet as these groups moved west in the 1870s, they were replaced by immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, primarily Poles as well as Lithuanians, Bohemians and Slovaks who found jobs in the Stock Yards. This working-class population lived in crowded conditions in modest frame houses built in the 1880s and 1890s.

In his muckraking 1906 novel *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair characterized Stock Yard workers as the “wage slaves of the Beef Trust.” Despite the grinding poverty documented by Sinclair, retail merchants Julius Oppenheimer and Simeon Lederer reasoned that the neighborhood contained a large population with at least some income to spend on basic goods and necessities. In 1894 Oppenheimer and Lederer constructed a four-story brick store building at the southwest corner of W. 47<sup>th</sup> St. and Ashland Av. (the site of the current building) which housed the first Oppenheimer department store. The store remained in business for twenty years until it was destroyed by fire in 1914, whereupon Oppenheimer immediately began to rebuild in the spring of 1915.

Oppenheimer commissioned Alfred S. Alschuler, a 39-year-old Chicago architect establishing himself as a specialist in industrial and commercial buildings, to design a new department store for the site. Completed in November 1915 at a cost of \$80,000, the J. Oppenheimer & Co. department store forms the original part of the current structure and consists of the four-story block that includes three structural bays on Ashland Av. and six bays on 47<sup>th</sup> St. as well as the attached one-story wing extending an additional two bays south along Ashland and a wing (originally two stories) extending four bays west on 47<sup>th</sup> St. Alschuler’s design employed a white-glazed terra-cotta façade, reinforced-concrete floors and a cast-iron structural frame (steel framing was used in later additions to the building).

In 1926 Oppenheimer sold the property to the Buffalo-based Larkin Company, which operated their department store in the building for only two years, until 1928, when it was purchased by the Goldblatt Brothers, a rising Chicago retailer. Established in 1914 by Maurice and Nathan Goldblatt, Goldblatt’s had successfully adapted the department store model from a purveyor of luxury goods to a retailer offering discounted merchandise to working-class shoppers.

The circa 1915 photo (right) depicts the building in its original form as built for the J. Oppenheimer & Co. Department Store. The photo is from the archives of the American Terra Cotta Company which manufactured the building's cladding.



The isometric diagram (above) shows the evolution of the building, beginning with the original 1915 structure (fig. A). In 1929 the Goldblatt Bros. added the five-story block that extended the building west along 47th St. (fig. B), and in 1933 the Goldblatts added two stories atop the two-story portion of the 1915 building (fig. C) which visually unified the 47th St. facade.

The Goldblatt brothers prospered and added onto the building in 1929 and again in 1933 bringing it to its current form. In both its structure and exterior design, the original 1915 building was well-suited for later additions, and in both cases the Goldblatts commissioned the original architect, Alfred Alschuler, to design them. The 1929 addition housed additional retail space and offices in a five-story block that expanded the building west along 47<sup>th</sup> St. to Marshfield Av. In 1933 the Goldblatts engaged Alschuler again to add two stories atop the two-story portion of the 1915 building. This final addition visually unified the 47<sup>th</sup> St. facade with a regular rhythm of fourteen structural bays and a continuous cornice above the fourth story.

Though it was built in three stages from 1915 to 1933, the overall coherency of Alschuler's original design and his additions allows the building to be described as a single work. Rectangular in plan with a flat roof, the building fills the 245' x 125' lot bounded by Ashland Av., W. 47<sup>th</sup> St., Marshfield Av., and the alley to the south. The primary mass of the building is a four-story block (1915, 1933) at the intersection of 47<sup>th</sup> St. and Ashland Av. Attached to this is a five-story block (1929) to the west and a one-story wing (1915) to the south.

The terra-cotta clad primary elevations facing the commercial thoroughfares of 47th St. (north) and Ashland Av. (east) have the most architectural interest. Typical of retail buildings of the period, these elevations are organized into two horizontal divisions: a street-level one-story base composed almost entirely of large storefront windows for the display of goods, and upper floors with a unified architectural treatment of large window openings defined by a grid of piers and spandrels.

The base of the building consists of a nearly-continuous band of storefront windows placed in front of the building's structural columns. While the current aluminum storefront frames are not historic, the overall size of the windows is consistent with historic photos of the building. The low granite bulkhead below and the transom windows above the storefronts are original. There are four recessed entrances to the building from the sidewalk, one at Ashland Av. and three along 47<sup>th</sup> St. The coved soffit and ornamental metal decoration at the westernmost entrance on 47th St. appears to be original. A horizontal band of terra cotta with a simple raised-panel design marks the transition from the storefront level and the upper floors. The band includes integral terra-cotta lettering identifying the "West 47th Street" and "S. Ashland Ave" facades, and the name "Goldblatt Bros." is applied with bronze lettering at three locations along the band.

Above the street-level base, the upper portion of the building is composed of a rectangular arrangement of continuous vertical piers and recessed spandrels framing bay-spanning window openings. The piers organize the facades into a series of repeating structural bays, with fourteen on 47th St. and five on Ashland Av. The piers are rendered as paired pilasters with simplified Classical-style bases and capitals. The horizontal line of the floor levels is marked by recessed spandrels with simplified panel ornamentation. The grid-like arrangement of intersecting piers and spandrels expresses the underlying metal structural frame of the building and places the design within the Chicago School, a style of commercial architecture developed and refined in Chicago from 1875 through the 1920s. The building's fenestration is also characteristic of the style, with each opening combining a fixed casement flanked on each side by double-



The above photo shows the primary elevations of the building which are clad in white glazed terra cotta. The shorter Ashland Av. elevation (left side of photo) includes the four-story portion which is divided into three bays as well as the one-story wing. The longer W. 47th St. elevation (right side of photo) is arranged in a series of fourteen regularly-spaced bays. Though built in three stages, architect Alfred S. Alschuler's design for the original structure and two additions forms a unified and coherent whole.



Looking east down 47th Street (above) reveals the building's nearly continuous band of storefront windows at the sidewalk level. On the upper floors projecting piers and recessed spandrel panels intersect to create the grid-like rectangular aesthetic that is characteristic of Chicago School commercial architecture. The Marshfield Av. elevation (on the right) has a finished terra-cotta return for one bay, while the rest of this secondary facade is face brick.





While the overall design of the building follows the practical tenets of the Chicago School, Alschuler decorated the exterior with restrained Classical-style terra-cotta ornamental details, including pilaster capitals and a cornice (top photo) as well as the tablet at the parapet (middle photo) framed by swags and a Greek-key motif. Street names (left) are molded into the terra-cotta band above the storefront windows.

hung-sash windows, a grouping known as the “Chicago window” for its association with the Chicago School of architecture.

The upper stories are clad in white glazed terra cotta that displays a high degree of craftsmanship in its ornamentation. The terra cotta was manufactured by the American Terra Cotta Company, based in the town of Terra Cotta near Crystal Lake, Illinois. From 1881 to 1966 the company was one of the nation’s largest producers of terra cotta.

The fourth story of the building is topped with a Classical entablature with a projecting cornice and raised parapet. Portions of the building rise above the parapet, including a one-story mechanical penthouse near the center of the north façade and the fifth story at the northwest corner of the building. A wood water tank painted with the Goldblatts name is located on a penthouse above the south elevation.

The west elevation facing Marshfield Av., a primarily residential street, includes a single terracotta clad bay turning the corner of the building, while the less-visible remainder of the facade is face brick trimmed with terra-cotta stringcourses and window sills. The south elevations of the building facing the alley are utilitarian common brick.

#### *The Neighborhood Department Store in Chicago*

The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building is a fine example of a neighborhood department store, an important building type in the development of Chicago’s outlying neighborhoods. As the city expanded outward from the Loop from the 1870s to the 1920s, neighborhood shopping districts emerged which provided working- and middle-class Chicagoans with a range of stores, banks, professional services, and theaters as a more convenient and affordable alternative to Chicago’s Loop.

The intersection of 47th St. and Ashland Av. was one of these neighborhood commercial nodes, catering to the nearby working-class residents of Back of the Yards, many of whom lacked both the financial means and convenient public transportation to shop in Chicago’s Loop. Goldblatt’s, and its competitors such as Kruse’s, Klein’s, Diebold’s, Woolworth’s and Sears, Roebuck & Co., grew successful in these outlying commercial districts by offering a range of affordably-priced wares for Chicago’s large working-class population.

Chicago’s neighborhood department stores tend to occupy between three and nine building lots with a height of three to five stories and were often, along with banks, the most visually-prominent buildings in these neighborhood commercial areas. At street-level the buildings feature large storefront windows for the display of goods while the upper floors are typically clad in brick masonry or terra cotta. In lieu of architectural ornamentation or rich materials, neighborhood department store buildings relied on their larger massing and scale as well as corner locations to stand out in the commercial streetscape. Like the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building, many of these buildings were built in stages, with additions added as businesses grew.

In addition to the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building, other examples of this building type include the first Goldblatt Bros. Department Store at 1613-35 W. Chicago



In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, neighborhood department stores anchored Chicago's commercial districts outside the Loop. Examples of this building type include: the Moeller Bros. (1895, top left) and Wieboldt's (1898, top right) stores in the Milwaukee Av. Chicago Landmark District; as well as the Goldblatt's (1927, bottom left) store in the Milwaukee-Diversey-Kimball District. The Loren Miller & Company store (1915, bottom right) is located in the Uptown Square Historic District on the National Register.

Av., a designated Chicago Landmark designed by Alfred S. Alschuler and built in stages between 1921-22 and 1925-28. Other examples can be found in Chicago Landmark districts, including the Wieboldt's (1898), Moeller Brothers (1895) and Iverson's (ca 1900) stores in the Milwaukee Avenue District; as well as the Goldblatt's (1927) and Woolworth's (1922) stores in the Milwaukee-Diversey-Kimball District. Another representative example of the type is the Loren Miller & Company store (1915) at 4726 N. Broadway in the Uptown Square Historic District on the National Register.

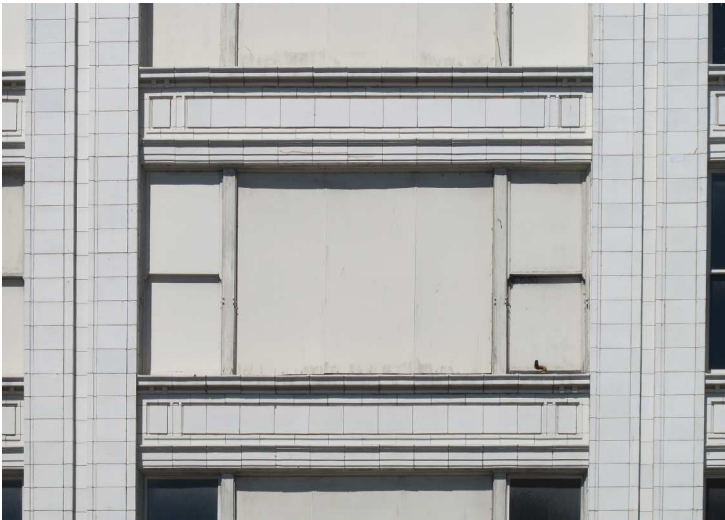
## **THE CHICAGO SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE**

With its projecting vertical piers, recessed spandrel panels, three-part window openings and restrained ornamentation, the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building exemplifies the Chicago School, a style of commercial architecture that blossomed as the city was rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1871. Chicago's booming economy in the late 1880s and '90s led to soaring real estate prices in Chicago's Loop. To take maximum advantage of expensive land, Chicago architects perfected the tall commercial office building by adopting and advancing new building technologies such the elevator, plate glass, the floating and caisson foundation, and, most importantly, the metal (first iron, then steel) structural frame.

William Le Baron Jenney's seminal Home Insurance Building at LaSalle and Adams streets was the first building to employ an iron structural frame in 1884. By eliminating load-bearing masonry exterior walls, the metal skeleton allowed for more rentable floor space on the building's interior and much larger window openings for maximum lighting and ventilation. The metal frame also allowed for architects to build taller and more quickly, and it more readily accepted additional stories. In addition to supporting the building, Chicago school architects allowed the steel frame to guide the aesthetic of the façade by expressing the rectangular arrangement of vertical piers and horizontal beams, perhaps most boldly exemplified by Burnham and Root's Reliance Building (1895) which clearly reveals its skeletal metal structure beneath crisp terra-cotta sheathing.

Though the Chicago School developed in the design of the city's early office towers, Louis Sullivan's design for the Carson Pirie Scott & Company (1899, 1903-04) successfully adapted the construction technology and bold aesthetic of the style to the department store building type. The style offered two advantages for the large retailer: the metal frame allowed the ground floor to be opened up with vast storefront display windows, and the skeletal structure allowed for large open floor areas that could be flexibly accommodate the various "departments" of the store unobstructed by load-bearing partition walls.

The development of the Chicago School was eclipsed in 1893 when the World's Columbian Exposition swayed architectural tastes toward Beaux-Art classicism. However, the practical methods and aesthetic of the Chicago School continued to be applied for commercial and manufacturing buildings outside the Loop, including neighborhood department stores, well into the 1920s. The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building exemplifies the persistence of the style.



The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building is a late example of the Chicago School of commercial architecture. Characteristic of the style, the façade (top) is arranged as a grid of continuous vertical piers and recessed horizontal spandrel panels which visually express the building's underlying steel structural frame. Also characteristic of the style are the building's "Chicago windows" (middle) with a central fixed casement window flanked by double-hung-sash windows. While the Chicago School took root in the design of office buildings, it was also used for retail buildings, including prominent depart stores on Chicago's State Street. The most important of these being Louis Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott & Company Building (1899, 1903-04, bottom) at State and Madison.

In addition to its Chicago School architectural character, the building is decorated with pared-down Classical-style details in glazed terra-cotta. The piers are treated as paired pilasters with a torus-molded base, paneled shaft and paired capitals with egg-and-dart molding. The spandrels are similarly decorated with a recessed panel motif. The building is topped with a Classical entablature that includes a frieze decorated and floral ornament, a modillion course and projecting cornice terminating in a raised parapet with paneled decoration. At the Ashland Av. facade the parapet includes a tablet framed with festoons.

## **ARCHITECT ALFRED S. ALSCHULER**

**Alfred S. Alschuler (1876-1940)**, the architect of the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building, was one of Chicago's most prominent early-twentieth century architects. Born in Chicago to German immigrant parents, Alschuler received bachelor's and master's degrees in architecture from the Armour Institute of Technology (now the Illinois Institute of Technology), and also took classes at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1900 he began his professional career in the office of Dankmar Adler, and he subsequently worked with both Adler and Samuel Atwater Treat. In 1907 he established his own practice which grew to become one of the city's largest architectural firms during the 1910s and 1920s, a period when the city was developing a large manufacturing base. Although a specialist in the design of industrial and commercial buildings, Alschuler received a wide variety of commissions, including office towers, synagogues, libraries, automobile showrooms, and hotels.

Through the course of his career, Alschuler designed dozens of industrial and warehouse buildings throughout Chicago, many of which were located in the Central Manufacturing District near 35<sup>th</sup> St. and Ashland Av. A *Chicago Daily News* article from January 23, 1937, noted Alschuler's contributions to the city's industrial architecture:

*Many of the improvements in industrial and commercial buildings in Chicago can be attributed to the genius of Alfred S. Alschuler, one of the city's prominent architects. During the course of thirty-five years or so he has introduced to Chicago such items of far-reaching importance as the extensive use of reinforced concrete in buildings, multicolored terra cotta, and standardized office-building units.*

While the requirements of industrial and warehouse buildings placed function over aesthetics, Alschuler believed that even these utilitarian buildings had a civic obligation to visually enhance the city. A biographical sketch of Alschuler in the Art Institute of Chicago's 1982 publication *Chicago Architects Design: A Century of Architectural Drawings from the Art Institute of Chicago*, remarks:

*At a time when the city was developing an industrial fringe of unattractive functional buildings, Alschuler's harmonious and refined designs and restrained Classical detailing were changing the texture of the city.*



Architect Alfred S. Alschuler (above, 1876-1940) was one of Chicago's most prominent early 20th-century architects. His industrial and warehouse buildings reflected his design philosophy that however utilitarian these types of buildings were, they should make an aesthetic contribution to the cityscape.

Noted examples include the John B. Thompson Commissary Building (top left) from 1912 at 340 N. Clark; the Pelouze Building (middle left) from 1916 at 218 E. Ohio; the Florsheim Shoe Company Building (bottom left), a designated Chicago Landmark from 1926 at 3963 W. Belmont Av.; and the Kling Brothers Company (bottom right) from 1920 at 2300 West Wabansia Avenue.





In addition to his many industrial and warehouse buildings, the versatile Alschuler designed a range of building types in a variety of styles, including the Beaux-Arts-style London Guarantee Building (1923, top left, a designated Chicago Landmark), the Byzantine Revival-style K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple (1926, top right, also a designated Chicago Landmark), the Spanish Baroque Revival-style Hudson Motor Car Co. Showroom (1922, lower left, in the Motor Row Chicago Landmark District) and the Art Moderne-style Benson & Rixon Department Store building (1937, lower right).



Though designed in a range of historical styles of architecture, Alschuler's body of work includes notable examples of architectural modernism. For example, his 1926 design for a manufacturing plant for the Florsheim Shoe Company (a designated Chicago Landmark) at 3963 W. Belmont Av. is a bold application of architectural modernism to an industrial building with its sleek, rectilinear forms formed by its exposed reinforced-concrete structure. Another example of his work in the modernist vein is the Benson & Rixon Department Store at 230 S State St., a 1937 Art Moderne-style design with smooth terra cotta cladding, pronounced bands of glass-block windows and curved corners.

The London Guarantee Building (1923) at 360 N. Michigan Av. (a designated Chicago landmark) was Alschuler's most important commission. Commanding an important setting at the Michigan Avenue Bridge just across the Chicago River from the Wrigley Building and the Tribune Tower, the 22-story Classical Revival-style building features a concave façade and is topped by a cupola replicating a Greco-Roman lantern. Its design earned Alschuler a gold medal from the North Michigan Avenue Improvement Association for the best new building of 1923 in the North Central District. Other extant office towers by Alschuler include a seven-story addition to the Blum Building at 624 S. Michigan Av., included in the Historic Michigan Boulevard Chicago Landmark District.

Alschuler was also known as the "Temple builder" due to the many synagogues he designed, including K.A.M Isaiah Israel Temple (1926) at 1100 E. Hyde Park Boulevard (a designated Chicago landmark). The walls of this Byzantine-style edifice feature polychromatic brick in various shapes laid up randomly to suggest old, sun-baked walls. Another important synagogue design by Alschuler is the Sinai Temple at 4622 S. Martin Luther King Drive (1909-12), now Mt. Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church.

In addition to the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building, Alschuler designed several stores and store additions for the Goldblatt Brothers chain, including their first department store (1921-22 and 1925-28) at 1613-35 W. Chicago Av. (a designated Chicago landmark), as well as the Goldblatt's store buildings at 3149 N. Lincoln Av. from 1929.

Civic buildings by Alschuler include Engine Company 5, Truck 2, 324 S. DesPlaines Av. (1928, a designated Chicago Landmark), the Legler Regional Library at 115 S. Pulaski Av. (1919), and the Henry W. Austin Public Library at 5615 W. Race St. (1928). Alschuler's 1930 Harrison Hotel at 63 E. Harrison St. is a high-style Art Deco edifice replete with stylized foliage, while automobile showrooms for the Hudson and Marmon automobile-manufacturing companies, located in the Motor Row Chicago Landmark District and both dating from 1922, feature exuberant terra-cotta ornamentation.

## **GOLDBLATT BROS., INC.**

Little is known about Julius Oppenheimer, who built the original portion of the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Bros. Store. The building is significant, however, for its long association with the Goldblatt Brothers, a pioneering Chicago retailer who expanded the building



Brothers Nathan (bottom left) and Maurice Goldblatt (bottom right) established their first store on Chicago Av. in 1914 in a rented store. By 1922 they built their first store at 1613-35 W. Chicago Av., (above, a designated Chicago Landmark). It was also designed by Alfred S. Alschuler and expanded 1925-28. The brothers are credited with inventing discount-retailing methods that are now standard practices for retailers across the nation.

and operated it as a department store from 1928 to 1985. Rather than the high style and luxury of Chicago's State Street department stores, the Goldblatt brothers helped revolutionize American retailing by catering to working class and immigrant Chicagoans by offering low-priced merchandise in neighborhood department stores.

The company was established by brothers Maurice and Nathan Goldblatt, who were later joined in managing the company by their younger brothers Joel and Louis. The brothers were part of a family that immigrated to Chicago from Poland in 1904. In 1914 Maurice and Nathan opened the Goldblatt Bros. Drygoods Store in a rented building at 1615 W. Chicago Av. in a neighborhood on Chicago's near Northwest Side known as "Polish Downtown." The store sold a wide range of low-priced household goods to an immigrant population and the business grew rapidly. In 1922, the brothers commissioned Alfred Alschuler to design their first department store which they expanded in stages through 1928. The building survives at 1613-35 W. Chicago Av. and is a designated Chicago Landmark.

In the same year that they finished expansion of their first store, the Goldblatts purchased the former Oppenheimer department store at 47<sup>th</sup> St. and Ashland Av. in 1928 to serve as the first branch, initiating a period of expansion in the company that allowed it to proclaim itself in 1930 "America's Fastest Growing Department Chain." At its peak in the 1970s, the chain included forty-seven stores throughout Chicago and Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin. As with the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store, the company typically established branches by purchasing existing store buildings and expanding upon them.

The Goldblatt brothers innovated discount-retailing methods that are now standard in American merchandising. At the core of the company's approach was the idea that everyone was a consumer, even the working poor. In *Retailing* magazine, Nathan Goldblatt asserted that: "the people of Chicago want to buy goods [and] 95 percent of them have not the money to spend for everything they want, nor can they buy anything without considering its cost." To cater to this thrifty majority, Goldblatts located their stores in Chicago's outlying neighborhoods and established longer hours (7 a.m. - 9 p.m.) to allow for shopping before and after work. In addition to newspaper advertisements, Goldblatts published their own circulars which they delivered to neighborhood residents. The company also pursued aggressive wholesale buying practices to keep their prices low, often carrying merchandise with slight defects or from unknown brands.

In his 1994 memoir, Louis Goldblatt claimed that the company was the first retailer to allow the customer to see and handle merchandise by eliminating sales clerks and counters:

*Goldblatts displayed its merchandise out in the open, stacked or dumped on tables. This enabled customers to see and handle it, encouraging impulse sales. We called this self-selection; it grew up to become the self-service at discount stores. Goldblatts was about the only store in the country that tied a pair of shoes together with its own laces and dumped them on a table, inviting the customer to find the right style and size, rather than selling them from a box which required a clerk and space-taking chairs.*

All Chicago Stores Open Monday Night Until 9 P. M.

A Great One Day Underselling Event!

Popular Cigarettes

Carton of 200  
Lucky Strike, Old Gold, Chesterfield, 94c  
Carton 100  
Old Gold 94c

# Monday is Goldblatt Day

Open until 9 P.M.

**Libby's**  
Red Alaska Salmon 14c  
Eggs Dozen 14 1/2c  
Fresh Eggs Dozen 14 1/2c  
Wilson's "Clear Brook" Butter 18c  
Famous Brands HAMS, LB. 10c  
Child's Combed Yarn Hose 7 1/2c  
Marquette Panels 29c  
81x90 In. Stamped Bed Spreads 59c  
21x27-Inch "Burton" Pillows 57c

**Van Hensen COLLARS** 19c  
Bicycle Playing Cards 29c  
Armour's or Wilson's Bacon 1/2 lb. 6 1/2c  
Men's "Headlight" Overalls 94c  
"Storm Hero" Umbrellas 89c  
All Padded Ironing Boards 69c  
"Orchard" Merc. Crochet Thread 18c  
Boys' Cotton Longies 44c

**Women's 100% All Silk Slips** 79c  
Granulated Sugar 10 lbs. 39c  
Nestle Bars 12 1/2c  
25c Paris GARTERS 10c  
Libby's, Pet or Carleton Milk 4 cans 19c  
White or Rye Bread 3c  
5 Packages Chewing Gum 3 pkgs. 5c  
"Hotpoint" Electric Iron 5 1/2 39c  
Big Yank Shirts 35c  
All Silk Pongee 12 1/2c  
Men's Fancy 10c Hose 5c  
Boys' or Men's Watches 59c  
Arrow Borax Laundry Soap 10 bars for 13c  
75c Champion Spark Plugs 39c  
Libby's Rose-Dale Peaches 11 1/2c  
Women's Reg. 49c Ties 19c

**Tomorrow is Goldblatt Day—**

A storewide event overflowing with marvelous values. Goldblatt Day is a day of rock bottom prices on merchandising of the highest quality. A day that brings super purchasing power to the dollars of thousands of shoppers who share in its savings! A day that is eagerly awaited by thousands of thrifty people who have learned from past Goldblatt Days that this is truly an event when money, even to the tiny cent, falls gently. Four acres of values are presented today! There are thousands of un-advertised values awaiting eager shoppers tomorrow. Every department in every store is participating and co-operating to the fullest degree.

A visit to any of our stores tomorrow will convince you that Goldblatt Day means you every cent of high quality, substantial, reasonable merchandise for less.

**9x12-Ft. All Hair Rug Pads** \$1.98  
Famous "Dazzie" Shoe Polish 4c  
Men's Denim Overalls 23c  
72x90 Inch Bed Sheets 19c  
Plaid Bed Blankets 33c  
No. 8 Galvanized Wash Boilers 77c  
Maxwell House or Welsch's Coffee 3 Can 75c  
Famous O. N. T. Crochet Thread 6 1/2c

**27x27-In. Birdseye Diapers** 59c  
Chicken Bones 23c  
Bissel's Carpet Sweepers \$2.98  
"Pioneer" Alarm Clocks 49c  
Willow Clothes Baskets 29c  
Union Hardware Roller Skates 99c  
Wisc. Potatoes 100 Sack 88c

**15c Picture Cards** 8c  
Sisal's Carpet Sweeper \$2.98  
Arrow Borax Laundry Soap 10 bars for 13c  
75c Champion Spark Plugs 39c  
Libby's Rose-Dale Peaches 11 1/2c  
Women's Reg. 49c Ties 19c

**6 GOLDBLATT BROS.**

DEPT. STORES  
Broadway at Lawrence Chicago Ave. and Ashland 91st St. and Commercial  
Lincoln and Belmont 47th St. and Ashland  
Holtzman Ave. 27th St.  
Astor Street 47th St.

A display ad (right) for a Goldblatt's sale in 1933 showed its six store buildings, including 4700 S. Ashland Av. Goods on offer included butter, spark plugs, roller skates and canaries in "full plumage" with a written guarantee that each bird had a "beautiful song."

A painted sign (right) on the south wall of the 47th and Ashland store.



Louis Goldblatt went on to offer a description of what the interior of the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store might have been like:

*We had no carpeting on the floors, no expensive fixtures, or fancy treatments. Cartons and paper cluttered our stores. The selling floors were a hodgepodge of grocery tables, wearing apparel, and household needs, interspersed with hawker demonstrators of, perhaps, knife sharpeners or furniture polish. Goldblatts was a beehive of excitement and fun; it was not intended to be fancy or even comfortable.*

The formula worked. During the Great Depression Goldblatt's sales nearly tripled and by 1933 the chain expanded to include five stores in Chicago, an additional two in Joliet and one in Hammond, Indiana. In 1936, Goldblatts bought the former 11-story Rothschild-Davis store at 333 S. State St., and opened their flagship store (now the DePaul University Center) on Chicago's State Street. Architectural historian Richard Longstreth noted that "no other company in the United States approached the scale of Goldblatts operations" during the Depression.

In 1944 Nathan Goldblatt died of cancer at age 49, prompting the surviving brothers to establish the Cancer Research Foundation in 1954. Maurice Goldblatt transferred his executive duties to his brothers to focus his attention as a major contributor and fundraiser for the construction in 1950 of the Nathan Goldblatt Memorial Hospital for cancer research at the University of Chicago. The Cancer Research Foundation continues to carry out its mission.

In the post-war period the Goldblatts chain continued to expand to become the largest department store chain in Chicago, and the third-largest in the nation. Following demographic shifts, the new stores were located in growing communities at the periphery of the city and in the suburbs where the stores anchored larger shopping centers. Increasing competition from national chains such as Sears, Montgomery Ward and K-Mart ultimately forced Goldblatts into bankruptcy in 1981. In 1985 the chain's remaining stores, including the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store, were purchased by the Ames Company who continued to operate them as discount department stores. Patrick Kane, a descendant of Nathan Goldblatt, bought the store at 4700 S. Ashland in 1999 and re-opened it as the Goldblatt Bros. Department Store. The store finally closed in 2003.

## **CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION**

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a recommendation of landmark designation to the City Council for an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art or other object within the City of Chicago if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for designation," as well as the integrity criterion.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building be

designated as a Chicago Landmark.

***Criterion 1: Value as an Example of City, State or National Heritage***

*Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building exemplifies the important role that neighborhood department stores played as economic engines in the development of Chicago's neighborhood commercial districts in general, and specifically the intersection of 47th St. and Ashland Av., one of the oldest such districts in Chicago.
- The building reflects important aspects of Chicago's social, economic and cultural history, particularly the shopping habits of working-class residents of neighborhoods such as Back of the Yards, where retailers grew profitable by meeting the needs of local residents for practical and affordable merchandise.
- The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building was the first branch of the Goldblatt Bros. chain, which at its peak was the largest department store chain in Chicago and the third-largest in the nation, and which is regarded as a pioneer of discount retailing methods that have become standard practices.
- The construction of the building in 1915 and subsequent additions to it in 1929 and 1933 illustrate the economic prominence of the Oppenheimer and Goldblatt department store companies, and more broadly the transformation of retailing in Chicago from small independent shop owners to large companies offering a wide range of goods at multiple branches as the city grew.

***Criterion 3: Identification with a Person***

*Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building is significant for its association with brothers Maurice and Nathan Goldblatt who founded and led Goldblatt Bros., Inc., a Chicago-based company established in 1914 that grew into a regionally-prominent discount department store chain in the mid-twentieth century.
- The Goldblatt brothers are credited with inventing discount-retailing methods that became standard practices for retailers across the nation in the twentieth century, including locating their stores in working-class neighborhoods, extending hours to allow for shopping before and after work, buying wholesale goods at the lowest price to undercut their competition, and eliminating clerks and counters to allow customers to select and handle products themselves.

***Criterion 4: Exemplary Architecture***

*Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, unique-*

*ness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*

- With its continuous vertical piers and recessed spandrel panels that express the underlying metal structural frame, as well as its three-part windows and restrained ornamentation, the design of the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building is an excellent example of the Chicago School, a style of commercial architecture developed in Chicago after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 that became internationally significant for its influence on the modern movement in architecture.
- The building exemplifies the application of Chicago School principals to the design of the department store building type, seen earlier in such iconic Chicago Buildings as Louis Sullivan's for the Carson Pirie Scott & Company Building, and the continued use of the Chicago School in retail commercial architecture well into the twentieth century.
- The building is decorated with fine Classical Revival-style details, such as the decorated pilaster bases and capitals and the modillion course at the cornice as well as other characteristic decorative motifs such as egg-and-dart molding, recessed panels and festoons.
- The building is clad with white-glazed terra cotta that displays a high degree of craftsmanship in its ornamental details and overall high-quality design and fabrication.

### ***Criterion 5: Work of Significant Architect or Designer***

*Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building was designed in phases by Alfred S. Alschuler, one of Chicago's prominent early-twentieth century architects whose body of work includes such noteworthy buildings as the London Guarantee and Exchange Building, K.A.M. Isaiah Israel Temple, the first Goldblatt Brothers Department Store, and the Florsheim Shoe Company Building, all designated Chicago Landmarks.
- Alschuler's career coincided with Chicago's expansion as a manufacturing center, and he became known as an innovative and prolific designer of industrial and commercial buildings that combined functionality and aesthetics, enhancing the character of Chicago's manufacturing districts.

### ***Integrity Criterion***

*The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic, community, architectural or aesthetic value.*

The Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building remains in its original location. Its setting today is primarily a neighborhood commercial district as it was when the building was built. Architect Alfred Alschuler's design of the original building and two additions is clearly legible as a Chicago School-style department store with Classical revival style details.

The building's historic materials, glazed terra cotta and brick masonry, remain in place. A small number of terra cotta units, mostly at the parapet level, exhibit cracking, a common and repairable condition of terra cotta buildings of this vintage. None of the cracked units appear to be displaced from the wall plane. A small number of terra cotta units have been removed from the façade and the voids have been infilled with white glazed brick. These missing units can be replaced based on patterns from identical units elsewhere on the façade.

The most significant alteration to the exterior is the replacement of the original street-level storefront windows and doors with a contemporary aluminum storefront system. The replacement storefronts retain the original window configuration and overall transparency. The steel transom windows above the storefront windows and the granite bulkhead beneath them are original. Above the street level, the building retains its original wood sash windows.

A projecting blade sign is located at the northeast corner of the building and a steel sign armature is mounted on the roof at this corner of the building. Archival images indicate that these were not original to the building but were in place as early as 1933. These accessory elements neither impair or enhance the building's integrity.

As a whole, the building's condition is repairable and its alterations are minor and reversible, and they do not detract from the building's ability to express its historic, architectural and aesthetic value.

## **SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES**

Whenever an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art or other object is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its evaluation of the Oppenheimer-Goldblatt Bros. Department Store Building, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified as follows:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building.



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