

## Joseph Loth & Company Silk Ribbon Mill

Individual Landmark

1818-1838 Amsterdam Avenue

Designation Date: September 21, 1993



Figure 5. Joseph Loth & Company Silk Ribbon Mill, 1818-1838 Amsterdam Avenue. Amsterdam Avenue facade.

Photo credit: Carl Forster

The Joseph Loth & Company Silk Ribbon Mill, which stands out among American textile mill buildings due to its exceptional architectural character and unusual design, was commissioned in 1885 by the Loth family of silk manufacturers—probably Bernard Loth, the technical expert— and designed by the Austro-Hungarian emigre architect Hugo Kafka, noted for his commercial and residential work in New York City. The building was occupied by Joseph Loth & Company, a prominent firm that was in operation in New York City from about 1875 to 1902 and produced silk ribbons marketed under the trademark "Fair and Square."

The plan of the mill, a reversed K with the upright along Amsterdam Avenue, is original in concept, and is an ingenious and practical solution that allowed for large, well-lighted spaces unobstructed by columns. This plan reflected the requirements and strictures of the New York City building code, more so than the "slow-burning construction" standards recommended by the fire insurance "mutuals," which were applied to most mills constructed in this country.

Certain features of the mill design were characteristic of mill buildings of the era, particularly the central tower (burned 1916) and exterior brick walls consisting of narrow bays defined by pilasters and filled with windows. The hand of the architect is apparent in the carefully detailed facades which are organized with central and end pavilions, above which panels at the parapets identify the firm and its product. These facades are enlivened with rock-faced

sandstone, ornamental pressed brick elements, and corbelled brick features. The chimney, rising between wings of the mill, is a reminder that the facility had coal-fired steam boilers that drove the belts and line shafting for the power looms, and ran the generator for the electric lights, still relatively novel in the mid-1880s.

Built during an interim between periods of residential development, the mill was one of the few industries to locate in the Washington Heights area of Manhattan. This architecturally distinguished mill building, which was altered and enlarged in 1904 while retaining its distinctive K-plan and architectural character, has long played a vital role in the commercial life of the community, housing neighborhood businesses and light-manufacturing operations.

[Read the full NYC LPC designation report here.](#)