

# CAPITAL LOSSES

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF  
WASHINGTON'S DESTROYED BUILDINGS

—SECOND EDITION—

JAMES M. GOODE

FOREWORD BY RICHARD LONGSTRETH

2003 edition

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*Frontispiece. Demolition of the Washington Loan and Trust Company Building  
(Riggs Bank branch), 17th and G Streets, NW, in 1974. Through the wrecked  
windows can be seen the historic State, War, and Navy Building (now the Old  
Executive Office Building). Photograph by Carleton Knight III of the National  
Trust for Historic Preservation.*

## MANHATTAN LAUNDRY

1326 Florida Avenue, NW

1935—damaged by fire 1978—scheduled for demolition 1979—saved and restored 1987

Architect: Bedford Brown IV, Washington, D.C.

Compared with New York or Philadelphia, Washington was so possessed by Beaux Arts neoclassicism that it had few outstanding buildings in the art moderne style in the 1920s and 1930s. It would seem that the classical roots of moderne would deem it particularly appropriate; yet the style was short lived, and Washington architecture is characteristically *retardataire*, so art moderne simply passed the city by.

An exception was the Manhattan Laundry Building, still standing in 1979 in a mutilated condition, with its demolition expected imminently. The building is heavily ornamented in the art deco manner. There is even a touch of Bauhaus here. Its facade displays certain motifs characteristic of contemporary commercial buildings both in the United States and abroad, including the elegant bandings of enameled metal that mimic such traditional architectural devices as a layered architrave (or bottom part of an entablature) at the roof level, pilasters, and rustication. The way the second- and third-story windows float in a wall of light, made pos-

sible by the use of glass bricks (also used in its interior partitions), must have seemed especially “wondrous” at the time. The facade was further enriched by the use of brilliantly colored green and yellow enameled metal panels of water lilies above the second-floor windows and a Greek Key design around the main entrance. Clothes were laundered and dry cleaned on the first and second floors; the third floor was used by the clerical staff, who worked in rooms divided by walls of small, translucent glass blocks.

The firm was founded by John W. Lowe, about 1905, in a Victorian building adjacent to the art deco structure. When the Lowe family sold the firm in 1973 the abandoned building was badly vandalized soon afterward and was further damaged by fire in 1978.

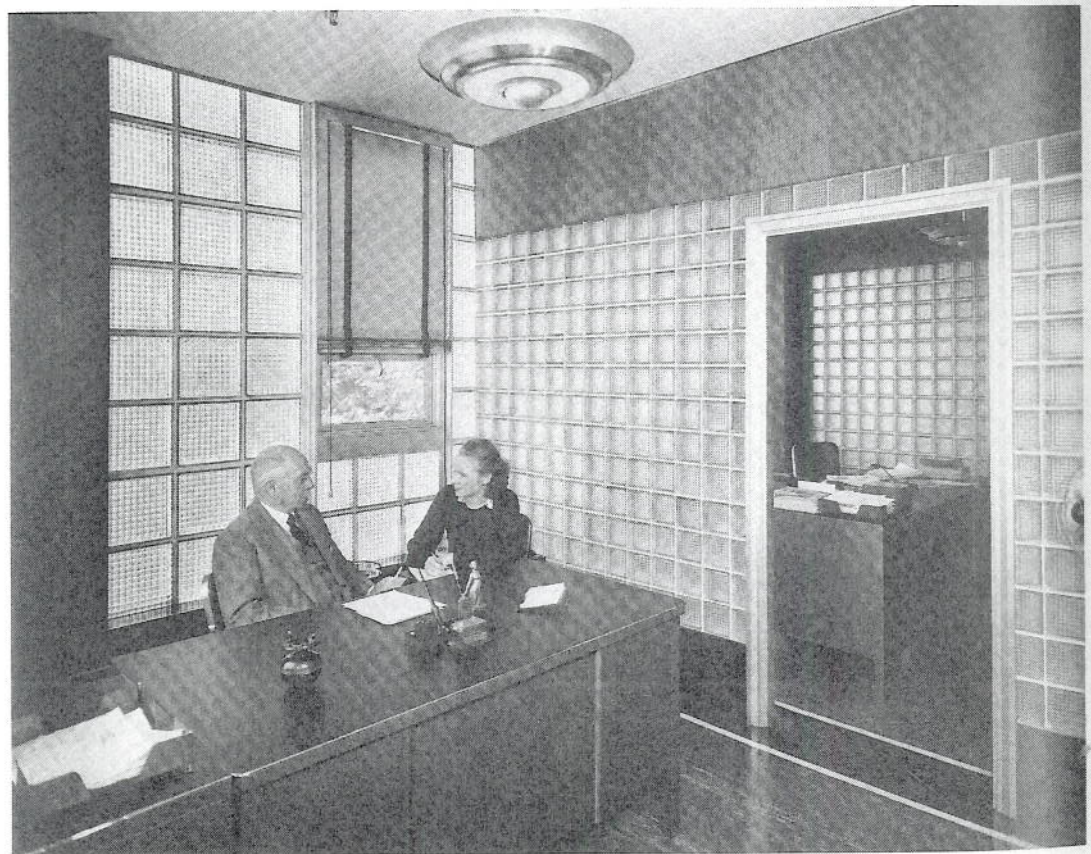
Although it was scheduled to be razed in 1979, it was fortunately saved and restored in 1987 by developer Jeffrey N. Cohen (and architects KressCox Associates), who realized the architectural significance of the structure when its inclusion in the first edition of *Capital Losses* was pointed out.

*The Manhattan Laundry remains one of Washington's most distinctive art moderne buildings. Although seriously damaged by fire in 1978, it was restored a decade later.*





The outstanding features of the Manhattan Laundry offices were these art deco glass-block walls.



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