

MC GRAW-HILL BUILDING (now G.H.I. Building), 330 West 42nd Street,  
Borough of Manhattan.  
Built 1930-31; architects Raymond Hood, Godley & Fouilhoux.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1032, Lot 48.

On May 8, 1979, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the McGraw-Hill Building (now G.H.I. Building) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 13). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. Several letters have been received supporting this designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The 35-story blue-green McGraw-Hill Building, sitting in the midst of parking lots, tenements and a bus station on the west side of midtown, has been unique since its completion in 1931. Since its creation, the building has been hailed as New York's first monument to the International Style, reclaimed by proponents of the Moderne, and decried as an ugly "green elephant." It has been thought the key to great developments on the west side, and lamented as an "overimprovement" for a hopelessly depressed area. As a design, it was the product of the gradual shift in architectural taste from the machine-age abstract decorativeness of the Moderne or Art Deco style to the corporate-age utility of the International Style, and of the constantly innovative and growing architectural genius of Raymond Hood. As a real-estate venture it was the product of the forces of extraordinary corporate growth in the 1920s which saw the merger of two small independent specialist publishing houses into a giant institution, and of the efficiency and economy-mindedness of James H. McGraw.

#### McGraw-Hill

James Herbert McGraw (1860-1948) and John Alexander Hill (1858-1916) were pioneers in the publication of specialized journals for the electrical and engineering fields.<sup>1</sup> Hill, originally from Sandgate, Vermont, grew up in Mazomanie, Wisconsin; after working as a railway engineer out west he came to New York City in 1888 to join the American Machinist Publishing Company. He quickly became editor of Locomotive Engineer, buying it in 1891 and going on to build the Hill Publishing Company (formed in 1901) which, by the time of his death, was publishing five major engineering journals: American Machinist, Power, Engineering News, Engineering and Mining Journal, and Coal Age. In 1914 he built the twelve-story Hill Building for his growing company at 469-473 Tenth Avenue at 36th Street, and incorporated into it several innovations--including an early version of air-conditioning combined with unopenable windows. McGraw, from Panama, Chautauqua County, New York, worked upstate as a printer and later as a school teacher before coming to New York City in 1885 to join the American Railway Publishing Company. He later took over the Street Railway Journal, and gradually built up the McGraw Publishing Company until by 1917 it included six major electrical and engineering journals: Electrical World, Electric Railway Journal, Electrical Merchandising, Engineering Record, Metallurgical and Chemical Engineering, and The Contractor. McGraw's company was located at 239 West 39th Street from about 1910.

McGraw and Hill first joined forces in 1909. Each had branched out into the publication of engineering books, and in that year they merged their side-line operations into the McGraw-Hill Book Company -- a flip of a coin determined that Hill would be its president and that McGraw's name would come first in the new company's name. Following Hill's death in 1916 the two journal-publishing companies, which had been major rivals, considered merging as well, and in 1917 the McGraw-Hill Publishing Company came into being, with James H. McGraw its president.

McGraw-Hill expanded tremendously over the next twelve years. The new company moved into the Hill Building at Tenth Avenue, and sold the McGraw Building to the United Publishing Corporation, although the Book Company remained as tenant until 1921 when it moved into the Penn Terminal Building at 370 Seventh Avenue at 31st Street. With the United Publishing Corp. the company purchased the Newton Falls Paper Company in 1920. In 1926 McGraw-Hill Catalog and Directory Company, Inc., was formed. By 1929 McGraw-Hill was publishing over thirty journals, and its branches were spread all over New York City. The publishing company was becoming cramped for space in the old Hill Building, even though a thirteenth story had been added. The building's elevators could not handle the increasing loads. Even after the freight elevators had been adapted for passenger use, a memo was sent out requesting employees to walk up one and down one or two flights to help free up the service. Clearly a new building was called for. In October 1929, a new building committee was appointed by the Board of Directors which was now chaired by James McGraw. The following year the Annual Report announced:

The present headquarters building has long been outgrown; offices of the Book Company, McGraw-Hill Catalog and Directory Company, the Business Publishers International Corporation, the Circulation Department, and Atlantic District Sales staff of the Publishing company being located at different addresses in New York City. For the purpose of bringing all these units under one roof and effecting substantial economies in operation and improved efficiencies in administration, a thirty-three story modern office building is now being erected by an associated company, in which we will be the principal tenants under a favorable lease. It will occupy a plot of ground containing approximately 50,000 square feet on West Forty-Second Street extending through to Forty-First Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues and will provide every facility for the complete publishing operation.<sup>2</sup>

### Site

The site of the McGraw-Hill Building is one of its peculiarities -- the location of a tall office building west of Eighth Avenue was as much an anomaly fifty years ago as it is today. On the 42nd Street portion of the site were three four-story and two five-story tenement buildings; along the West 41st Street front were six four-story buildings.<sup>3</sup> Many of these had been converted to offices and stores by 1930. A 1940 real-estate assessment described the building's immediate neighbors on West 42nd Street as "old, obsolete structures, of limited height.... cheap stores and restaurants.... poorer class lofts, offices

and rooming houses with considerable vacancies." Along West 41st Street were "old mercantile and rooming house structures, commercial garages and parking lots." There were also a "local Greek settlement" and "tenements with colored occupancy."<sup>4</sup>

Despite the depressed state of the area, however, developer John A. Larkin, head of the 330 West Forty-Second Street Corporation, had assembled over three years "one of the largest plottages under one control on the west side of midtown Manhattan"<sup>5</sup> comprising roughly 47,500 square feet in the middle of the block bounded by 42nd and 41st Streets and Eighth and Ninth Avenues. In 1926 he surprised the real-estate world by filing plans for a 110-story, \$22½ million skyscraper on the site. The project, like many in the later 1920s, came to nothing, and in 1930 Larkin effectively gave away the property to McGraw-Hill, in exchange for the old Hill Building and its site.

McGraw-Hill's new building committee had been looking at real estate between 34th and 47th Streets from Second to Ninth Avenues. After several possibilities had been considered and rejected, two final sites were put forward: the Larkin property, and a plot just around the corner from it at the northeast corner of West 41st Street and Eighth Avenue.

The reasons for locating a major business headquarters so far west of midtown were strictly practical and economic, involving considerations of zoning, transportation, and land costs. McGraw-Hill planned to house its printing plant on the lower floors of the new building, something the city's zoning laws did not permit between Third and Seventh Avenues.<sup>6</sup> West 42nd Street, even so far over, was a major traffic artery, and the site had easy access to Grand Central Terminal and Penn Station, as well as to post offices. A 1931 advertisement for the building included a map showing the "8 minutes walk to Grand Central Terminal."<sup>7</sup> Another consideration was that various engineering societies were close by, especially the Engineers' Club on West 40th Street which McGraw frequented to keep up with developments in the world serviced by his journals. The move in any case was not entirely into new territory, as the Hill Building was only a few blocks away at Tenth Avenue and 36th Street. A final consideration was the high cost of land in Manhattan. Not only was land cheaper outside of midtown, but the committee had worked out the exchange arrangement with Larkin, and felt that, "If these figures work out as we anticipate, we will acquire this new building in which all our activities in New York can be housed under one roof without raising any new money except by mortgaging our new property."<sup>8</sup> Two days after the memo, McGraw-Hill and Larkin came to an agreement; this was announced in the Times on May 30, 1930, and the final exchange took place on July 1.

McGraw-Hill used only part of the plot for its building, reserving the western portion for future expansion or sale. The buildings there were demolished with the intention of erecting in their place an "attractive looking 'taxpayer'"<sup>9</sup>; ultimately the lot was left vacant, however, to be used for parking, and finally sold in 1951, at which time the present post office was constructed.

Having chosen an out-of-the-way site in a depressed part of the city, McGraw-Hill spokespeople developed a tradition of rosy optimism about the area's future. In 1932, Frank Gale, editor of the McGraw-Hill News, wrote in the New York Herald Tribune that only six of the 33 stories of the building remained unrented, and

that property values in the neighborhood were going up thanks to the presence of McGraw-Hill. He quoted E.D. Conklin, president of the 342 West 42nd Street Corporation, which owned the building, as saying:

Interesting plans are afoot for the improvement of West Forty-Second Street. These plans, should they go through may give to our building the distinction of being a key structure in a great architectural scheme involving development and beautification of the area. Such plans would fit in perfectly with the presence at the corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-Second Street of the world's largest subway station.<sup>10</sup>

Four years later, in a similar burst of enthusiasm on the occasion of the opening of a bank branch in the ground floor of the building, the McGraw-Hill Bulletin announced:

The opening of Clinton Trust Company's "McGraw-Hill Building Office" (that's what they have named it) is evidence of a vast change that is taking place in the West Side. Zoning laws recently enacted will, in the course of a few years, eliminate many of the dwellings in this section, opening the space to business and industry. As the elevated motor highway is extended up the Hudson, it will become the main artery of traffic leading to the North. The New York Central Railroad has plans under way to put its tracks in a subway and turn Eleventh Avenue into a boulevard.<sup>11</sup>

Nothing of the kind ever happened, and the 1940 appraisal of the building concluded that "the McGraw-Hill Building as a real-estate enterprise is an over-improvement for the location."<sup>12</sup> The area had not changed significantly by the time McGraw-Hill finally sold its headquarters in 1970 on moving to Rockefeller Center.

#### Raymond Hood

Once having decided on a site, McGraw-Hill commissioned the firm of Raymond Hood, Godley & Foulhoux to be the architect, and Starrett Brothers and Eken to handle the construction of a building which would meet the company's needs and bring it distinction.

Raymond Hood (1881-1934), originally from Pawtucket, R.I., was an architect educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, who at the age of 41, after a dismally obscure career in New York, suddenly found himself the winner of the most celebrated architectural competition in the country -- for the Chicago Tribune Tower -- and during his next and last ten years became known as one of New York's most brilliant architects.

During his career Hood designed several houses, several churches, and, during his underemployed days, Mori's Restaurant; he introduced roof-gardens to New York on a large scale at Rockefeller Center; he produced an extraordinary manifesto for rebuilding Manhattan along the lines of Le Corbusier's Voisin Plan; but his fame rests primarily on his five skyscrapers in Chicago and New York:



the Tribune Tower (1922), the American Radiator Building (1923-24), the Daily News Building (1929-30), the McGraw-Hill Building (1930-31), and the RCA Building at Rockefeller Center, where he was one of the architects of the designing team until his death.

From his occasional writings and interviews, and from his friends' recollections, it appears that Hood considered himself a business-like architect, with the function of "manufacturing shelter," rather than an artist:

There has been entirely too much talk about the collaboration of architect, painter and sculptor; nowadays, the collaborators are the architects, the engineer, and the plumber. ...Buildings are constructed for certain purposes, and the buildings of today are more practical from the standpoint of the man who is in them than the older buildings. ...We are considering comfort and convenience much more than appearance and effect.<sup>13</sup>

In the Daily News Building, and later in the McGraw-Hill, Hood's practical approach produced "actually a factory, done at factory prices" which rented as office space.<sup>14</sup> This approach was probably a factor in his generally good working relationships, noted by acquaintances, with such businessmen clients as Joseph Patterson for the Daily News Building, Robert McCormick for the Tribune Tower, and John Todd for Rockefeller Center.<sup>15</sup> It would certainly have been attractive to James McGraw.

In accordance with this insistence on the practical, Hood in his writings on architecture repeated the arguments of utility and functionalism generally associated with Bauhaus theory: "Beauty is utility, developed in a manner to which the eye is accustomed by habit, in so far as this development does not detract from its quality of usefulness."<sup>16</sup>

The same man, however, promoted and developed roof gardens, and large-scale polychromy for buildings, neither of which were within the strict bounds of "utility." Despite his insistence that his buildings were products of zoning and economic requirements, and the rules of functionalism, each of his skyscrapers was a remarkable and unique creation, defined by a combination of massing and color, which today must be called Moderne or Art Deco. His name was frequently mentioned together with those of Ralph Walker and Ely Jacques Kahn, leaders of that style in the 1920s, and the three were close professional friends. In only a decade Hood took the skyscraper form from the neo-Gothic fantasy of the Tribune Tower -- the style he had learned while working for Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson -- to the modernistic massing of the RCA Building. His only skyscraper to approach the International Style was the McGraw-Hill.

Hood believed that the development of skyscrapers showed up the sham nature of facade architecture.<sup>17</sup> Each of his own skyscrapers was developed as a free-standing tower expressed through massing and applied color, rather than through the design of each front as an applied facade.

In his first building following the Tribune, Hood transformed what might have been a conventional neo-Gothic tower using setbacks, beveled corners, and an unusual black and gold color scheme to create an unmistakable and unique new kind of skyscraper for the American Radiator Company. At the Daily News Building, he abandoned all traces of the Gothic, and the still regular massing of the earlier building, concentrating instead on irregularly-placed masses of wall articulated with long slender tiers of vertically-oriented windows, and colored it white with reddish-brown stripes using polychrome brick patterns and red window curtains. To the McGraw-Hill Building he gave two separate contours --one a graceful Deco tower and the other an International Style slab -- horizontal bands of windows, and a facing of machine-made blue-green terra-cotta blocks. At the RCA Building he returned to the massing of the News Building; its color, like that of all the Rockefeller Center buildings, is the natural gray with light brown overtones of the limestone cladding.

Hood insisted that the massing of these skyscrapers was simply the result of the zoning laws, but the great differences among them suggest instead that they were the creations of a master designer. To achieve the end of designing mass rather than outline, he abandoned the Beaux-Arts style of drawing (as in his sketches for the Tribune Tower) in favor of an approach using plasticine models which he pioneered, and which he believed should be taught in the architecture schools.<sup>18</sup>

Hood similarly downplayed his introduction of polychromy to building, denying any intentions of "symbolic" effects -- for instance that the Radiator Building might have been designed to look like a glowing coal, or the Daily News Building like a stack of newspapers. About the News he wrote, "The owner was in accord with the architect that giving color to the building was the most simple and direct way to get an effective exterior...."<sup>19</sup> Applied color became for him a replacement for applied ornament, and was an integral part in the design of almost all the buildings following the American Radiator. Besides the skyscrapers, the Beaux-Arts Apartments had alternate courses of red and black brick; the Chicago World's Fair buildings were painted red, blue and yellow; there were pastel colors on the house of Joseph Patterson of the Daily News; and gray and vermillion were used for the Rex Cole Bay Ridge Show Room. Hood's own description of the color of the McGraw-Hill Building was almost poetic, betraying the aesthetic intentions hidden behind his insistence on "utility."

By making each of his skyscrapers thoroughly distinct from all other city buildings through massing and coloring, Hood essentially turned each one into an emblem of the commissioning client.<sup>20</sup> The black and gold Gothic-modern mass made the Radiator Building instantly recognizable. Going further in this direction at the News Building, Hood turned its lobby into a popular science display, later writing:

There is a small explosion of architectural effect at the entrance and in the lobby, where the owner gave us \$150,000 to spend. His thought about this was, I feel, very intelligent, -- that \$150,000 spent in one place, at the entrance, might give a satisfying effect; but that where spread thin over the whole exterior, would amount to almost nothing.<sup>21</sup>

At the McGraw-Hill Building he carried the advertising notion to its logical conclusion by crowning the building with eleven-foot high terra-cotta letters spelling "McGRAW-HILL," making the company's name an integral part of the design.

When McGraw-Hill approached Hood in 1930, he was at the height of his career. He had been appointed one of the eight supervising architects for the Chicago World's Fair; he was one of the architects for Rockefeller Center; and his Daily News Building was rising on East 42nd Street. Articles about him were appearing everywhere, and one summed up his position in the architectural world as follows:

Leading the New York modernists at this moment are Ralph Walker, Ely Jacques Kahn, and Raymond Hood. ....Raymond Hood possesses the position in architecture that he wants. He is its brilliant bad boy.<sup>22</sup>

### The Building

In accordance with James McGraw's instincts for economy and utility, and with Raymond Hood's business-like approach to architecture, the design and construction of the McGraw-Hill Building were to an extent the results of practical considerations: "Economy, efficiency and good working conditions were the three factors uppermost in mind when we first started plans."<sup>23</sup> To McGraw-Hill's requirements for space, approximately 350,000 square feet, were added 150,000 to 200,000 square feet of rentable area, enough to "yield sufficient income to insure our occupancy at a rental of 90¢ per sq. ft. without putting us too far into the real estate business."<sup>24</sup> The company decided against using the entire Larkin plot for its building, because that would have produced "a squat type of structure with larger areas in the lower floors than could be economically used by us or rented."<sup>25</sup> Instead, 130 feet of frontage was taken on West 42nd Street leaving enough to allow reasonable development on the rest of the plot in the future. The floor area requirements of the company, in combination with the setback requirements of the zoning law resulted in a 32-story tower.

Inside, the McGraw-Hill Building, although intended to be the office headquarters of a major corporation, was designed not as an office building but instead as a less expensive "ordinary better grade loft type" building.<sup>26</sup> Fouilhoux, Hood's partner, explained:

The requirements for large areas for manufacturing purposes in the lower stories, and for big clerical forces in the office floors in the upper portion, also the dimensions of the property, led us to plan floors in large units extending from street to street.<sup>27</sup>

The plans for consolidation of all the various McGraw-Hill functions in one building included housing the company's presses on the fifth, sixth and seventh floors, although the printing operation ultimately proved uneconomical and was sold in 1933. The second through tenth floors were therefore designed for the extra heavy loads necessary for manufacturing and printing industries, and given extra high ceilings -- throughout the building these range from 12 feet to 18 feet 6 inches. Within these spaces the departments were arranged in the most efficient order possible.

The plant has throughout been planned by well known engineers not only for straight-line production in each manufacturing department but also for the consecutive handling of all work, in the proper order, from one department to another, until the completed product is ready for mailing for shipping.<sup>28</sup>

In conformity with this principle, the editorial and some rental offices were in the shallower uppermost floors. Below these were the composing, printing, and packing departments; and the shipping bays were at the ground level on West 41st Street. On the 32nd and 33rd floors were the corporate offices and executive restaurant, and above these a 250-seat auditorium used for McGraw-Hill meetings and also lent out to engineering, technical and industrial groups. The shallow areas created by the successive setbacks gave these upper office and executive floors abundant natural light.

Fouilhoux summarized the results of this functional approach to the design:

The exterior is, therefore, a frank expression of these requirements. Except for the piers and columns, all the front and side wall elevations are nothing but a continuous row of windows. These windows are set as near the ceiling as the law will allow to insure the maximum of light. The only actual solid wall construction is the space from window head to window sill. The shape is dictated somewhat by the zoning requirements and by the adaptation to these zoning requirements of the location of the office floors in the upper stories, where, the space being shallower, better natural light will be available to the clerical forces and other office workers.... The resulting shape of the building is, we believe, a pleasant one as it is seen when approached from the east or west. The set backs are not apparent from the north or south.<sup>29</sup>

Hood designed a thirty-five story office building with setbacks at the 11th, 16th, 32nd and 34th floors on the north and south sides, with an additional setback at the seventh floor on the south. From the east and west the setbacks produce a stepped tower profile, but from the north and south they are invisible, giving the building the illusion of being a slab. Each story comprises a horizontal band of windows having the appearance of "ribbon windows" but actually composed of seven sets of four double-hung windows each, separated by painted metal strips. At each floor the window bands are separated by continuous courses of blue-green terra-cotta blocks, the varying size and tone of which produce a somewhat shimmering effect. The ground level on West 42nd Street comprises two store-fronts, each three bays wide, flanking the entrance in the central bay. The eastern store originally housed the McGraw-Hill Book Store, and the western one a bank. Immediately above the ground floor, in place of the terra-cotta tiles, runs a blue metal course with silver painted bands. Letters superimposed over this course spelling out "McGRAW-HILL" have been replaced with the letters "GHI," the emblem of the building's more recent owner. The entrance walls curve in from the main front, and are finished in alternate dark blue and green steel bands separated by silver and gold colored metal tubes. These bands are carried into the lobby of the building on green enameled steel walls. The 32nd and 33rd floors are set back and apart from the main tower of the building; they originally housed



the executive offices. Above the 34th-story windows rise eleven-foot high terra-cotta letters spelling out the name "McGraw-Hill." The eastern and western ends of the 34th and 35th stories are covered with a series of horizontal ribs, forming a pylon-like crown for the east and west fronts of the building.

Hood and Fouilhoux insisted, as they had for the American Radiator and Daily News Buildings, that the profile of the McGraw-Hill Building was the result of zoning laws, internal lighting needs, and economic requirements.<sup>30</sup> The same laws and requirements, however, had faced the same architect in the same year on the eastern edge of the same street for a similar type of client, the Daily News, but had produced a thoroughly different profile. Raymond Hood's notions about skyscrapers were changing, and he handled the design of the McGraw-Hill Building in what to his contemporaries was a very striking, unusual, and, to some, unsettling manner.

In fact, the building has two distinct profiles. The setbacks, just one bay wide, create "a pleasant [shape] as it is seen when approached from the east or west."<sup>31</sup> This is a Deco contour, not unlike that of the Chrysler or Empire State Buildings, of a broad base narrowing in steps, out of which rises a slender tower, crowned by the ribbed pylon-like narrow end of the McGraw-Hill sign. It is the shape seen in most photographs of the building, in views from either end of midtown, and especially in views from across the Hudson River, where it joins the outline of the Chrysler and Empire State Buildings as the major elements in the midtown skyline. But these setbacks "are not apparent from the north or south."<sup>32</sup> Seen from those angles the building seems to be a slab rising straight up with no break to the crowning insignia -- a classic International Style design.

The greatest amount of light possible was provided by the over 4000 double-hung windows: "every floor, whether it is the 28th, the 13th or the 6th, is well lighted no matter what the position of the sun." Employees had adequate natural light from 40 to 60 feet away from the windows, which were "placed as close to the ceiling of each floor as the building regulations would permit, and run down to about desk height from the floor."<sup>33</sup> They were not arranged, however, in the standard Deco fashion of indefinitely long vertical strips, as for example in the Daily News Building, but rather as horizontal bands circling the mass of the building -- the "ribbon windows" typical of the utilitarian International Style. They look, in fact, quite like factory loft windows. This arrangement gave the entire building a horizontal sense -- even the individual windows were composed only of horizontal elements, narrow panes divided by muntins, with no mullions used at all. The vertical organization of Deco buildings vividly expressed the tallness of skyscrapers as compared to their surrounding lower neighbors. The horizontal organization of McGraw-Hill instead expressed the structure of the building, 33 floors laid one on top of another. The window bands are broken only on the eastern front, where two wide vertical brick strips run up the middle to meet the crowning ribbed pylon, accentuating the Deco profile of that side. The arrangement of its windows, more than any other single feature, marked the building for critics and historians as one of the first major examples of the International Style in New York City.

To the unusual profile and window arrangements of the McGraw-Hill Building Hood added the totally unexpected element of colored terra-cotta. Architectural terra-cotta had come into use in America following George B. Post's 1878 design for the Long Island Historical Society in Brooklyn Heights, and had been used to

face entire buildings, including the Bayard-Condict Building, the neo-Gothic Liberty Tower and the Woolworth Building. McGraw-Hill claimed that theirs was the "largest application of machine-made terra cotta on record."<sup>34</sup> The terra-cotta was manufactured by the Federal Seaboard Terra Cotta Corporation in South Amboy, New Jersey.

When asked why steel and terra cotta were used on the face of the building instead of the usual brick or stone, Mr. Hood said that after six months or a year, the usual brick or stone facing begins to grow dingy and dank in appearance. Steel and terra Cotta are just as durable as brick or other materials usually used, and it has the decided advantage of not becoming dingy or nondescript.<sup>35</sup>

The color of the terra-cotta sheathing, however, was completely without precedent. Many different colors were considered, including yellow, orange, green, gray, red, "and even chinese red."<sup>36</sup> The blue-green, or sea-green, finally chosen was said to be McGraw's own choice. Exactly what color it is was not unanimously agreed on: Hood called it blue, while McGraw-Hill has always called the terra-cotta green, and their headquarters "the Green Building," or "the Green Kremlin."

Hood's approach to the color, unlike his approach to the windows, was thoroughly Moderne and Art Deco in inspiration. The color has dimmed somewhat with time, but a contemporary account describes its original appearance in detail:

This color /blue-green/ was chosen because of its atmospheric quality, effective under all conditions of sky color and brightness, enhanced by the glazed reflecting surface. The metal covered vertical piers are painted a dark green-blue, almost black. The metal windows are painted an apple green color. A narrow band of vermillion is painted on the face of the top jambs of the windows and across the face of the metal covered piers. Vermillion is also used on the underside of the horizontal projections on the pent house and on the signs on the sides of the pent house and over the front entrance. The golden color of the window shades effectively complements the cool tone of the building. They have a broad blue-green vertical stripe in the center tying them into the general color scheme. Their color is an unusually important element of the exterior design. The entrance vestibule is finished in sheet steel bands enameled dark blue and green alternately, separated by metal tubes finished in silver and gold. A portion of the main corridor adjoining the transverse elevator corridor is finished like the entrance vestibule. The walls of the main and elevator corridor are finished in sheet steel enameled a green color.<sup>37</sup>

The color scheme was carried inside the building, where "experts have studied with interest the use of two shades of green for interior walls, a combination believed to give the maximum of rest to the eyes of office workers."<sup>38</sup> Even the elevator cabs were finished in "green baked enamel on steel"<sup>39</sup> and the

elevator operators wore green uniforms with silver stripes.

Hood's own description of the exterior color gives away some of his true feelings about architectural color; he called it:

Dutch blue at the base, with sea green window bands, the blue gradually shading off to a lighter tone the higher the building goes, till it finally blends off into the azure blue of the sky. The final effect is a shimmery, satin finish, somewhat on the order of the body of an automobile.<sup>40</sup>

The gradual shading of color -- used also in buildings by Ralph Walker and others -- and the reference to the automobile are both classic Art Deco notions. The editor of the McGraw-Hill News continued the reference to the automobile, describing the colored steel bands at the entrance as being "lacquered like the body of a motor car,"<sup>41</sup> and noting that in the future they would be "simonized, just like the old car."<sup>42</sup>

The company was aware that its building's color was unusual, but was very proud of it, claiming its distinction as the largest polychromed building in the world:

We have enough faith in the attractiveness and utility of color in business building exteriors and interiors to hope that our pioneering effort will set a good example for the designers of future tall buildings.<sup>43</sup>

The crowning "MCGRAW-HILL" sign, Hood's final step towards making a building advertise its owner, was also a Moderne notion, adopted from the Russian Constructivist movement of the 1920s -- a similar sign can be seen at the top of the PSFS Building in Philadelphia. Hood intimated that it was a terra-cotta version of the electric signs then prevalent on New York buildings.<sup>44</sup> Each letter, eleven feet high, was specially constructed of hand made hollow terra-cotta blocks. The main part of each letter was white, but each had an orange stripe inset into it in separate blocks. The sign served also to hide the building's water tanks and other utility spaces. The horizontal ribs at the ends of the sign were also very much Moderne in inspiration, suggesting something of the German Expressionism of Eric Mendelsohn (cf. addition to the Rudolf-Mosse-Haus in Jerusalemer Strasse, Berlin, 1921-23).

### Critical Evaluation

Critical response to the McGraw-Hill Building has depended to an extent on the importance attached by reviewers to its different stylistic aspects. In the 1930s, immediately following the building's completion, Moderne or Art Deco was the norm, and what struck reviewers most about the new building was its leaning towards International Style forms.

The New Yorker in 1931 strongly disapproved of that leaning, expressing a dislike for the horizontal lines "which so many of our avant-garde have borrowed

from Germany," and calling the colored terra-cotta "a rather dispiriting grayish-green tile." Its writer however noted approvingly that the design was "austerely free from any architectural ornament, since Mr. Hood has adhered to his theory that ornament has no place in a business building any more than it has in a dynamo or a turbine."<sup>45</sup>

Alfred T. North, writing in 1932, expressed some of the general bewilderment about the building.

Today, it is necessary to establish new bases for appraising architectural excellence because the contemporary concept of architecture is new, as exemplified, for instance, in the recently constructed McGraw-Hill Building. Lacking all of the earmarks of historical architecture, this building is running the gauntlet of criticism.  
....Mr. Hood undoubtedly has given an expression of his idea that architecture is the business of manufacturing shelter....

North saw its horizontality and practicality as major characteristics, but he was mostly taken with the building's colors, and described at length its changing hues at sunrise and sunset -- which must have pleased Hood considering his interest in the "atmospheric qualities" of his choice. North ultimately postponed judgment, declaring the building to be "undoubtedly a decided step in a direction which we cannot clearly distinguish at this time...."<sup>46</sup>

That direction was towards the International Style, and later that year the McGraw-Hill won the honor of being one of four American buildings, and the only one in New York, to be included in Henry-Russell Hitchcock's and Philip Johnson's classic exhibition and book, The International Style. In the exhibition catalog, Hitchcock wrote:

Hood's latest important work, the McGraw-Hill Building, on West 42nd Street, built in 1931, marks a significant turning point in skyscraper design. It is the first tall commercial structure consciously horizontal in design executed by an architect since Sullivan's Schlesinger-Mayer Building in Chicago built in 1903.

....The continuous spandrels of the McGraw-Hill Building faced with sea green tiles, the vertical supports sheathed with dark green painted metal, and the wide groups of windows produce a standard wall pattern at once logical and agreeable.<sup>47</sup>

In The International Style Hitchcock and Johnson praised the building for its "lightness, simplicity and lack of applied verticalism," but they ignored its coloring and Moderne entrance and lobby, and lamented the extraordinary McGraw-Hill sign, which they called "an illogical and unhappy break in the general system of regularity," suggesting that the body of the building was betrayed by an applied top and bottom.<sup>48</sup>

By 1936, McGraw-Hill had accepted the label of "International Style" for its building:



The McGraw-Hill Building is what architects call the "International" Style, which was imported from Europe where it is popular in Holland and France. ....It is typical of this style to insist on the horizontal accent, and the late Raymond Hood emphasized that feature when he designed this building.<sup>49</sup>

As the International Style became increasingly prominent, McGraw-Hill became more and more important as its first American example. Lewis Mumford wrote in 1953 that it was "the first to discard vertical emphasis for horizontal bands of windows," observing that New York in the '30s brought the skyscraper "to its logical end: The Empire State Building, for its actual height, the Daily News for its proud verticality, the McGraw-hill for its horizontal bands of windows, and the New York Hospital for its spacious setting."<sup>50</sup>

Two years later, Emory Lewis wrote that post-war skyscrapers "have followed the pioneering McGraw-Hill building (1931) and discarded vertical emphasis for horizontal bands of windows."<sup>51</sup>

Recent historians, however, in response to the revival of interest in Moderne and Art Deco, have claimed the McGraw-Hill Building as a Moderne or Deco creation:

In the McGraw-Hill Building of 1929-30 (sic) Hood turned to a machine aesthetic in the streamlined lobby and ground floor exterior. Yet his surfacing material for the building above was the colored craft material, terra-cotta, of the first Art Deco buildings.<sup>52</sup>

In truth, the building is, in the words of Ada Louise Huxtable, "a unique blend of Moderne and International Style," a transitional step between the two approaches to architectural design.<sup>53</sup> The building's lobby and crowning sign, its "atmospheric" color, and its eastern and western profiles, are unmistakably Moderne in style. Even the "ribbon windows" are really a decorative illusion created by the painted metal dividers between the sets of double-hung windows. Yet it remains the first appearance of that type of window in a New York skyscraper, and the McGraw-Hill Building therefore has the double distinction of being both one of New York's major Moderne or Deco monuments, and the herald of the newly emerging International Style.

### Conclusion

In 1970, McGraw-Hill left their 42nd Street building to move to new headquarters at Rockefeller Center, for precisely the same reasons they had originally moved to 42nd Street. The building was an embarrassment and its future uncertain. At the same time a growing awareness of its unique place in New York's architectural spectrum was eliciting pleas for its preservation. The company originally sold the building to the CRF Equity Corporation for \$15 million; in 1973, however, CRF backed

out, leaving McGraw-Hill with a down payment and an empty building. McGraw-Hill maintained the building while proposals for using it as hospital space or housing were considered.<sup>54</sup> It was finally bought in 1974 by Group Health Insurance, for use as its headquarters.<sup>55</sup> As a result of that occupancy, the sign above the door has been changed and the roof sign painted a dull color to obscure the terra-cotta letters. GHI recently sold the building, but remains as tenant.

Hopes for West 42nd Street and the Times Square area are rising again. The Port Authority Bus Terminal is building an addition directly abutting the McGraw-Hill Building to the east; theaters and actors' housing have been brought to 42nd Street west of Eighth Avenue. As the West Side approaches what might be its long awaited revival, it is appropriate that this most conspicuous architectural gem receive its proper recognition.

#### FOOTNOTES

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3. Atlas of the City of New York (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley Co., 1928).
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5. "McGraw-Hill Gets Big Building Site," New York Times, May 30, 1930, p. 34.
6. Walter H. Kilham, Jr., Raymond Hood, Architect (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1973), p. 172.
7. 1931 advertisement republished in McGraw-Hill News, April 10, 1969, p. 2.
8. Memo from Building Committee, in McGraw-Hill Archive.
9. James H. McGraw, Jr., "Progress Report for the Executive Committee on New McGraw-Hill Building Project," September 9, 1930, in McGraw-Hill Archive.
10. Frank Gale, "New West Side Tower Already Well Occupied," New York Herald-Tribune, January 31, 1932.
11. McGraw-Hill Bulletin, September, 1936.
12. Appraisal....., p. 12.
13. "An Architect Hails the Rule of Reason--Design that is grounded in material and function will make buildings more beautiful, says Raymond Hood," New York Times Magazine, November 1st, 1931. (By S.J. Woolf.)
14. Allene Talmey, "Man Against the Sky," The New Yorker, April 11, 1931, p. 26.

15. Letter from Donald M. Douglas, March 3, 1970, to Walter Kilham, in Kilham papers at Avery Library, archive.
16. Raymond Hood, "What is Beauty in Architecture?" Liberty, December 7, 1929, p. 66.
17. Raymond Hood, "Hanging Gardens of New York...." New York Times Magazine, August 23, 1931, p. 2.
18. Rayne Adams, "Raymond Hood," Architecture, 63 (March 1931), 129-136.
19. Raymond Hood, "The News Building," Architectural Forum, 53 (November 1930), 531-2.
20. J.B. Griswold, "Nine Years Ago Raymond M. Hood Was Behind in his Rent.... Today--He holds the spotlight as a master showman of steel and stone," American Magazine, October 1931, p. 145.
21. Hood, "The News Building."
22. Talme, p. 26.
23. Raymond Hood, "Comfort, Daylight & Air Architect's Aim--Raymond Hood Tells How He Designed New Building," McGraw-Hill News, 5 (August 1931), p. 4.
24. McGraw, p. 2.
25. Ibid.
26. Appraisal...., p. 9.
27. Letter from Fouilhoux to Borden R. Putnam, June 3, 1931, McGraw-Hill Archive.
28. Robert F. Salade, "New McGraw-Hill Plant is Last Word in Scientific Planning..." The American Printer, 92 (June 1931), pp. 37-42.
29. Fouilhoux letter.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Hood, "Comfort...."
34. McGraw-Hill News, 5 (August 1931), p. 2.
35. Hood, "Comfort...."
36. Ibid.
37. Arthur T. North, Contemporary American Architects: Raymond M. Hood (New York: Whittlesey House, 1931), pp. 13-14.

38. Gale.
39. McGraw-Hill News, 5 (August 1931), p. 3.
40. Hood, "Comfort...."
41. Gale.
42. McGraw-Hill News
43. Gale.
44. Hood, "Comfort...."
45. "The Sky Line," The New Yorker, July 25, 1931, pp. 38-39.
46. Arthur T. North, "But... Is It Architecture?" American Architect, January, 1931, p. 31.
47. Modern Architecture International Exhibition, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1932), p. 131.
48. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, The International Style (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1932), pp. 156-7.
49. McGraw-Hill Bulletin, p. 5.
50. Lewis Mumford, "Architecture: 'Beautiful and Beloved,'" New York Times Magazine, February 1, 1953.
51. Emory Lewis, Cue Magazine, June 11, 1955, p. 13.
52. Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 26.
53. Ada Louise Huxtable, "The Skyscraper Style," New York Times, April 14, 1974, p. 59.
54. Paul Goldberger, "'Green Building' Is a White Elephant," New York Times, November 3, 1973, p. 31.
55. Carter B. Horsley, "Group Health Purchases The McGraw-Hill Building," New York Times, September 13, 1974, p. 1.

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## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the McGraw-Hill Building (now G.H.I. Building) has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the McGraw-Hill Building is a unique skyscraper, being both one of New York's major Art Deco monuments and the herald of the newly emerging International Style; that it was designed by the distinguished American architect Raymond Hood who achieved fame as a skyscraper designer; that among its outstanding features are the two profiles--one being a stepped tower and the other a slab, the distinctive blue-green terra-cotta facing, the horizontal window bands, and the entrance treatment; that it was built to serve a distinguished American publisher; that certain publishing requirements gave rise to the site and to various aspects of the design; that the building has received wide critical praise since its completion; and that the building is a key element in the revitalization of the West Side.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the McGraw-Hill Building (now G.H.I. Building), 330 West 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1032, Lot 48, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo Credit:  
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McGraw-Hill Building  
Built 1930-31

Architects:  
Raymond Hood  
Andre Fouilhoux