

Landmarks Preservation Commission
October 18, 1988, Designation List 210
LP-1546

MECHANICS' AND TRADESMEN'S INSTITUTE (Formerly Berkeley School)
20 West 44th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1890;
architects Lamb & Rich. Addition 1903-05; architect Ralph S.
Townsend.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1259, Lot 48.

On September 17, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute (Item No. 6). The hearing was continued to November 12, 1985 (Item No. 5). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. A total of four witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Two representatives of the owner spoke in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute as we see it today is the result of two major construction campaigns resulting in a coherent and sensitive design solution which blends monumental Beaux-Arts classicism with Renaissance Revival elements and a lingering touch of stratified Richardsonian design. Originally built in 1890 for the Berkeley School for Boys, a private school, and designed by Lamb & Rich, a firm well-known for educational institutions, this four-story Renaissance Revival structure was acquired by the Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen in 1899. Major alterations which involved removing the existing top story, and building three new stories, along with wings to the rear, were carried out by the fashionable apartment house architect, Ralph Samuel Townsend, in 1903-05.

The Berkeley School for Boys, founded in 1880, was a college preparatory school which placed emphasis on military drill exercise. The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, founded in 1785, has fostered building trade education throughout its long history, offering free instruction and maintaining one of New York City's three subscription libraries.¹ One of its major benefactors and members was Andrew Carnegie, the industrialist, who financed the alteration of the building.

Block History

The building of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen is located on a block of West 44th Street developed at the turn of the century with several private clubs and hotels. What had been a block dominated by the Sixth Avenue Railroad Depot, stables and a slaughterhouse became a fashionable neighborhood.² Thus, the Society building fits into a general development pattern and complements the other fine buildings on this street, including the Beaux-Arts Algonquin Hotel (1902), the neo-Georgian Harvard Club (1893-94), and the brilliant Beaux-Arts New York Yacht Club (1899-1900), all designated New York City Landmarks.

The Berkeley School for Boys

The Berkeley School for Boys opened on September 23, 1880, at 252 Madison Avenue, between 38th and 39th Streets. The first board of directors included the founder and first headmaster John S. White, a Harvard graduate; Johns Hopkins president Daniel C. Gilman, and Frederick Law Olmsted. According to the school's prospectus written in 1880, "The School will have but one single aim, to prepare boys thoroughly for the best Colleges and Schools of Science in the United States."³ Board member Daniel C. Gilman chose the name after Bishop George Berkeley of Cloyne, friend to education in Colonial America.⁴ The age of admission was set at twelve years for a five-year program. Academic subjects included Latin, English, Classics and mathematics. The first class numbered forty students including a corps of military cadets. An emphasis on military drill existed throughout the school's history.

The school moved to new quarters at 6 East 44th Street which opened on April 21, 1884. Their military drill exercises were conducted at 19 West 44th Street. Less than four years later the Berkeley Athletic Association erected the Berkeley Lyceum at the same address, which was completed February 1, 1888. In his opening address at the dedication ceremony on February 27, 1888, Joseph H. Choate gave credit to Dr. John S. White "who has devised and planned this beautiful building."⁵ The building was two stories, each thirty feet tall with the top story used as a gymnasium and the lower story divided into a mezzanine and theater. The Berkeley School hoped that the building would be rented out for ballroom and theater use on the first story and for athletic club use on the second story in the evenings.

During the summer of 1888 the school acquired the "Berkeley Oval" on the Harlem River in Morris Heights in the Bronx, just north of the Washington Bridge. This nearly ten-acre area included a ball field, tennis courts and a stable. The land was graded by Vaux & Company, Landscape Architects.⁶

The school moved into its new building designed by Lamb & Rich at 20 West 44th Street upon completion in the spring of 1891. It occupied the building until 1899, when it moved once again, this time to the corner of Madison Avenue and 49th Street. This building was the south half of what was formerly known as Hamilton Hall, Columbia College. Here again they built an armory and gymnasium on the 49th Street frontage.

The Berkeley School incorporated in 1900. In 1903 the school's address is listed as 5 West 75th Street for only one year.⁷ In the summer of 1904 John S. White severed his connections with the school, and its property passed to a corporation formed of New York businessmen, most of whom were connected with the school.⁸ In subsequent years the school first merged with the Columbia Institute (1908) and then with the Irving School for Boys (1917), and was located on the Upper West Side.⁹

The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen

The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen acquired 20 West 44th Street on September 14, 1899.¹⁰ The Society acquired the building from Columbia University (which had also owned the Berkeley School's Madison Avenue property) in trade "upon equal terms for our Sixteenth Street, Seventh Avenue, and Forty-eighth Street Properties, and at no cash outlay to the Society...beyond commissions and taxes."¹¹

The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York was founded on November 17, 1785, by twenty-two men at Walter Heyer's tavern on Pine Street,¹² for the "friendship, protection, and mutual benefit" of the Society's members and the city. It was incorporated in 1792. It soon became apparent that another objective of the Society would be the assistance of the widows and orphans of deceased Society members.

The Society's first home was at the corner of Broadway and Park Place, which was dedicated on January 4, 1803, concurrent with the construction of City Hall. One of City Hall's architects, Joseph Mangin, and several of its master builders were members of the Society.¹³ In 1820 the Society opened a school with seventy pupils in the New York School Building, Chatham Street, and in 1821 established their Apprentices' Library with a one thousand volume gift from a member. Originally books were loaned only to apprentices. In 1830, however, all Society members could use the library for a one dollar fee. In 1898 the Society dropped the name "Apprentices' Library" to imply a broadened scope and allow other readers its use. Thereafter the name became "Free Library of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen." Among its holdings was a major collection of architectural books, the bequest of architect J. Morgan Slade (1852-1882). The library remained free until

1972 when a subscription fee was imposed.

In 1810 a delegation was sent to the state government in Albany which returned with an act of the legislature establishing the Mechanics National Bank, the fourth bank in Manhattan, which eventually became a branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank. The bank's original capital of \$2 million was divided into shares of twenty five dollars each, available to members of the Society, which remained active in the affairs of the bank throughout the nineteenth century. As the Society grew, new quarters were required, and it moved to a new building on Crosby Street in 1832. After several generous bequests, the library had grown to the point where once again a move was necessary, this time to the Suydam Mansion on East 16th Street.

Free lecture courses for members were instituted in 1833, which continued until 1848. Among the lecturers were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Horace Greeley and Henry Ward Beecher. From 1820 to 1858 a day school was operated for the benefit of the children of members to compensate for the lack of public education. In 1858 the Society terminated its day classes and began evening classes under the newly established Mechanics Institute. These classes, which were more professional in nature, continue to be offered to the present day. They are free of charge and supported by private donations.

The Society's final move was to its present location. A \$25,000 gift from Society brother Andrew Carnegie helped to renovate the structure to make it suitable for the Society's uses.¹⁴ Carnegie was initiated into the Society in 1891. He may have become involved in the Society because of his industrial interests, the manufacture of steel. A more likely possibility was Carnegie's desire for the improvement of mankind.¹⁵ He gave large monetary gifts to public library buildings and colleges. Since the Society supported both a subscription library and free classes in various trades, these programs would be a natural beneficiary of his generosity.

Andrew Carnegie provided further financial support through the early twentieth century. A gift of \$250,000 in 1903 made possible the second great building campaign at 20 West 44th Street, under Ralph Samuel Townsend. Additional donations, including \$200,000 as an endowment fund in 1908, insured the survival of the Society.

Gifts did not always come in the form of money. In 1908 another member, John Malcolm Mossman, presented his collection of locks to the Society, which are still on display. The museum is on the second floor of the building and features items of historical interest such as original manuscripts, coins, firearms, and books.

The Architects

Hugh Lamb (1849-1903)

Charles Alonso Rich (1855-1943)

Hugh Lamb entered into a partnership with Lorenzo B. Wheeler in 1872 which lasted until 1882.¹⁶ Lamb and Wheeler are known to have constructed rowhouses and "French flats" on the Upper East Side and in Greenwich Village. From 1882 to 1899 Lamb joined Charles A. Rich as a partner in the firm of Lamb & Rich. Charles A. Rich was born in Beverly, Massachusetts and studied engineering at Dartmouth College, furthering his education in Europe from 1875 to 1880. Rich later became the senior partner in the firm of Rich, Mathesius & Koyle after 1903. His work included the Beaux-Arts style Bryant Park Studios (1900) at 80 West 40th Street and the 1907-08 addition to Richard Morris Hunt's Association Residence, a designated New York City Landmark. Rich was elected a fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1913 and retired from practice in the 1930s.

Lamb & Rich was one of the most prominent and prolific of New York City architectural firms in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They produced many high quality designs in the "chateausque," neo-Renaissance, Romanesque Revival and neo-Gothic styles, including the Pratt Institute's Main Building, Brooklyn (1885-87), a designated New York City Landmark, and the Harlem Club and Harlem Free Library (1889, 1892) in the Mt. Morris Park Historic District. They also designed Millbank, Brinkerhoff, and Fiske Halls, Barnard College (1890-97).

Their residential commissions include the Astral Apartments (1885-86), at 184 Franklin Street, Greenpoint, Brooklyn, a pioneering model tenement project and a designated New York City Landmark, and country houses around New York City such as Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay (1893) for Theodore Roosevelt. Lamb and Rich were quite active on the Upper West Side from 1885 through the 1890s, and a number of their designs were published. They designed a number of buildings within the West-End Collegiate Historic District, among them the rowhouses at 301-305 West 76th Street (1891), and 302-306 West 77th Street (1891).

Ralph Samuel Townsend (?-1921)

The career of Ralph Samuel Townsend, the architect of the 1903 addition to 20 West 44th Street, is not as well documented. He established his architectural practice by 1881 and designed a number of buildings in the Greenwich Village Historic District including the Queen Anne style Portsmouth Apartment House (1882), 38-44 West 9th Street and a number of apartment houses in collaboration with Herbert Harde on the Upper West Side. In 1906, Townsend, by now a partner with the firm of Townsend, Steinle and Haskell, designed the notable Beaux-Arts style

apartment building, the Kenilworth (1906-08) at 151 Central Park West, in the Central Park West-76th Street Historic District.

Description

The Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute is a blend of monumental Beaux-Arts Classicism and Renaissance Revival elements using a variety of materials. Located at 20 West 44th Street, the building has a one-hundred foot wide facade composed of Indiana limestone, yellow Roman brick, and terra-cotta. This well-integrated example of the Renaissance Revival style is actually the result of two building campaigns. With a symmetrically disposed facade of seven bays, seven stories in height, the building has a rusticated two-story base surmounted by double height side pavilions with round arches, flanking a slightly recessed three bay central portion with double height columns. An attic story completes the composition.

The original structure was four stories in height plus a basement and seven bays in width. A wide frieze over the three central bays reproduces a portion of the Parthenon frieze from casts in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹⁷ The most impressive interior space is the armory (now the library) two stories in height and measuring 85 x 100 feet, with a span of glass 55 feet wide (now painted over) covering the central portion of the room.¹⁸ The exterior of the building is a study in the tension between unifying and stratifying elements. The two lowest stories, though both rusticated, are clearly separated by a stone sill upon which rests the window openings of the second story, which have one-over-one wood sash. The windows at the first story (originally the basement) are now single-pane show windows with metal surrounds. The rustication is slightly rougher on the first story than on the second, and the window openings on the first story are flat arches with voussoirs with single-pane display windows, while the second story has arches with voussoirs in the outer bays, and smaller square openings with stained glass framing a large two-story arched entrance. This large arch unites the two stories, and contains a stained glass transom. The deeply recessed openings of these two stories provide a strong feeling of solidity. Immediately to the right of the entrance is the enframed plaque of the Society's coat of arms.

The upper floors are smooth-faced with elaborate decoration. Above the second story is a broad stone belt course interrupted by balustrades and column pedestals in the central three bays, which are slightly recessed. The third and fourth stories are united by double-height arched windows in the outer two bays, divided horizontally by large stone panels. The arched windows contain eight panes framed in wood, while the windows underneath the panels are one-over-one wood sash below transoms. The three central bays are crowned by segmental arches and are separated by engaged Ionic columns and pilasters. Raised roundels in the

spandrels and the frieze from the Parthenon in place of a more academic Ionic entablature further enhance the facade.

In 1903 Ralph Samuel Townsend began the second major building campaign by significantly and sensitively altering Lamb & Rich's building. Townsend added two extensions forming wings on the rear, removed the existing fourth story (at the level of the present fifth story), and replaced it with three new stories (now five, six and seven). The new stories are faced with brick. In addition, beautiful wrought-iron fire escapes were added at the outer bays of the facade. A more academically "correct" Corinthian order was installed in a half-columned central bay at the sixth story directly over the Ionic on the fourth. The one-over-one wood sash pattern of the third and fourth stories is continued except for the use of transoms. Elaborate egg-and-dart or banded foliage moldings are liberally distributed, primarily as framing devices for openings in the facade. The outer bays of the seventh story are framed in terra cotta with an Ionic half-column dividing a pair of windows. The central bays are divided by pilasters. The windows are wood one-over-one sash divided by mullions, with segmental-arched transoms above, and are crowned with voussoirs and keystones. A dentiled cornice supports a balustraded parapet, which surmounts the building. Without prior knowledge, it is impossible to tell that the upper three stories have been added. It appears that the party walls are unadorned brick, while the roof is tin.

Recent History

The building of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen has been little altered since Ralph Townsend's building campaign. In May of 1917 the stone stairs at the entrance to the building were removed along with sidewalk encumbrances, accompanied by the widening of West 44th Street. At that time, the basement level was designated the first story and the building classified a seven-story building. The building continues to function as the Society's home, operating its subscription library, and offering free evening classes in the building trades.

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NOTES

1. The other two are the New York Society Library and the Mercantile Library. See "Private Libraries seem part Club, part Museum and all Charm," New York Times, Oct. 30, 1986 C 10.
2. See LPC, Algonquin Hotel Designation Report, report prepared by Nancy Goeschel (New York 1982).
3. Berkeley School, New York City, Register and Prospectus 1880-81 (Boston, 1881), 2.
4. Prospectus 1880-81, 8.
5. Dedication of the Berkeley Lyceum 19 & 21 West Forty-Fourth Street, New York City (New York, 1888), 65.
6. Berkeley School, New York City Register for the Eleventh Year 1890-91 (Boston, 1891), 22.
7. Register of the Berkeley School for the Twenty-Third Year 1902-03 (n.p., 1903), 1.
8. Register, Twenty-Fifth Year, 7.
9. There is no record of the school after 1917. The current Berkeley School at 3 East 43rd Street is a secretarial school. See also Berkeley School founded in 1880, Columbia Institute founded 1874, Consolidated 1908, "Berkeley-Columbia" (Philadelphia, 1912), 2.
10. I.N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island, vol. 5 (New York, 1915-28), 2038
11. General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, One Hundred and Fourteenth Annual Report (New York, 1900), 9.
12. Historical Sketch and Government of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York 1785-1914, (n.p., 1914), 1.
13. Historical Sketch, 5.
14. Historical Sketch, 16.

15. For more detailed information on the life of Andrew Carnegie, see Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, "Andrew Carnegie," Dictionary of American Biography vol. 1 (New York, 1929), 449-505.
16. The following biographical information was compiled from: LPC, West End Collegiate Historic District Designation Report (New York, 1983).
17. See "The Berkeley School," American Architect and Building News, 30, no.775 (Nov., 1890), 74.
18. See "The Berkeley School," American Architect and Building News, 30, no.841 (Feb. 6, 1892), 95.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute 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 Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute by the firm of Lamb & Rich with a major addition by Ralph Samuel Townsend is a sensitive design solution, a fine and unusual example of a stylistic blending of Beaux-Arts Classicism and Renaissance Revival design; that since 1899 this architecturally distinguished building has served as the home of The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, an important institution founded in 1785, which has had many well-known members, among them architect Joseph Mangin and the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie; that it contains the Institute School and the library of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, one of only three subscription libraries in the City of New York; that the building's rusticated base with oversized arched openings, elegant iron fire escapes, frieze reproduced from the Parthenon and arcaded windows make this structure particularly notable; and that Ralph Townsend's addition is an exceptional example of how an addition can alter a building in a successful and sympathetic way.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute, 20 West 44th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1259, Lot 48, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute
20 West 44th Street

Architects: Lamb & Rich,
Ralph Samuel Townsend
Photo credit: Kevin McHugh



HELIOTYPE PRINTING CO. BOSTON.

THE BERKELEY SCHOOL, W. 44th STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

LAMB & RICH, Architects.

The Berkeley School

Photo: American Architect
and Building News,
February, 1892



Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute
Facade, first and second stories

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh



Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute
Facade, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh stories

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh



Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute
Facade, coat of arms

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh



Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute
Facade, eastern bay fire escape

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh

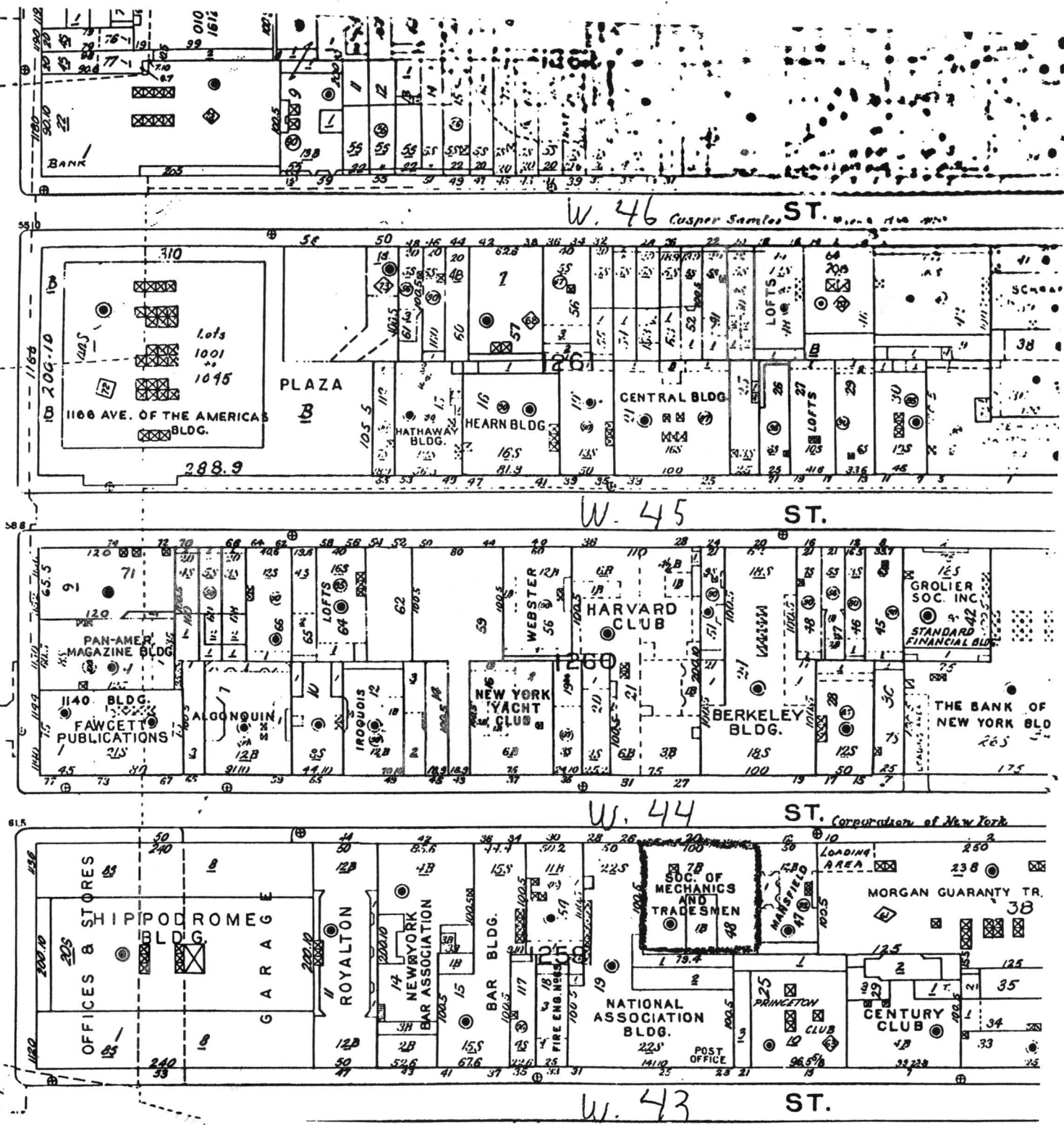


Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute
Facade, stained glass transom over entrance

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh

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The Mechanics' and Tradesmen's Institute, Landmark Site
 Graphic Source: Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1987-88