

Landmarks Preservation Commission
June 21, 1988, Designation List 205
LP-1635

FORMER NEW YORK BANK FOR SAVINGS INTERIOR consisting of the banking room, and the fixtures and interior components of this space, including wall surfaces (including engaged Corinthian columns, pilasters, entablature, and wainscot), ceiling surfaces (including the coffered plaster, segmental vault), dome surfaces (including the drum faced with alternating pilasters and windows of stained glass above cast-iron lattice radiator grilles), 81 Eighth Avenue a/k/a/ 301 West 14th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1896-97; architect Robert H. Robertson.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 738, Lot 33.

On September 15, 1987, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the former New York Bank for Savings Interior consisting of the first story vestibule, and banking room, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to all lighting fixtures, wall surfaces (including travertine facing, attached Corinthian columns and pilasters, and bronze wall clock dial), ceiling surfaces (including the plaster coffered, segmental vault), dome surfaces (including the drum faced with alternating Corinthian pilasters and square windows of stained glass above iron lattice radiator grilles) as an Interior Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmarks Site (Item No. 10). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Ten witnesses spoke in favor of the designation; twenty-one letters were received in support of designation. Two speakers, representing the owner, expressed opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The New York Savings Bank,¹ built in two sections in 1896-97, was designed by R.H. Robertson in the Academic Classic style popularized by the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893). Expressive of Robertson's functional designs, the interior gains significance because it is so intrinsically linked with the exterior, reflecting the exterior volume in the interior space. It is one of his most successful designs: for its size, the scale of the interior is monumental; its materials are exceptionally fine. While Robertson used the classical architectural vocabulary, he was by no means a strict classicist. His propensity for functional considerations place him among the significant New York architects of the late nineteenth century. Subsequent alterations to meet the changing needs of the bank have been largely compatible with Robertson's original design and have retained the banking room's spacious scale and much of its original interior finishes.

New York Savings Bank - the patron

The New York Savings Bank was organized in 1854 and opened at 21st Street and Third Avenue. Three years later the bank moved to the basement

of the four-story New York County Bank building on the northwest corner of 14th Street and Eighth Avenue (81 Eighth Avenue) -- the site of the present building. Following the Civil War the city continued to push northward and 14th Street, east and west, became a significant commercial thoroughfare; the introduction of rapid transportation encouraged the growth of light industry and tenement dwellings.² The New York Savings Bank, prospered.³ Subsequently the bank bought the building and to achieve greater visibility moved from the basement to the first floor. Other savings institutions were also aware of 14th Street's growing importance. The Greenwich Savings Bank moved to its fifth home and first new building at Sixth Avenue and 16th Street in 1892. In 1896-97 the New York Savings Bank demolished its old building to make way for a new and more conspicuous headquarters on the same site.

Banks and Architectural Imagery⁴

As industry, business, and commerce prospered after the Civil War, New York became the nation's financial capital. Apart from a few imposing buildings on Wall Street, however, banks were for the most part located in converted residences, or in office buildings, but prior to the 1880s and 1890s rarely in quarters designed for them. Property values being so high in the financial district, many commercial banks began to build office buildings, conducting business on the ground floors and renting revenue producing space above. Savings banks, many of which served small private investors, were, in contrast, generally not located in the Wall Street area; therefore, taking advantage of less expensive real estate, they were able to build monumental bank buildings for their exclusive use, many on corner sites.⁵ Savings bank buildings proliferated in the 1890s. Among them were the Greenwich Savings Bank (see above), designed by Robert W. Gibson; the Bank for Savings at 22nd and Fourth Avenue, designed by Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz (1892); the sumptuous Bowery Savings Bank, designed by McKim, Mead & White (1894); and Robertson's New York Bank for Savings. (Eleven years later, in 1907, the New York County National Bank, later a branch of the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Co., was erected on the southwest corner of Eighth Avenue and 14th Street, opposite Robertson's bank.)

The Academic Classicism popularized by the Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893) replaced both the Richardsonian Romanesque and subsequent neo-Renaissance styles in popularity. Its leading proponent was the firm of McKim, Mead & White.⁶ Of all public building types, certainly banks lent themselves particularly well to the monumental classical style initiated by this firm. Although by 1896 Robertson had already produced neo-Classical designs, a possible prototype for his New York Savings Bank building may have been, not an example of developed Classicism, but rather the rough-cut granite, tentatively neo-Classical Greenwich Savings Bank of 1892 (demolished) at the southeast corner of Sixth Avenue and 16th Street, designed by Robert W. Gibson.⁷ What may have attracted Robertson to the Greenwich Savings Bank building was Gibson's use of the corner site, so like that of the New York Savings Bank. The entrance was through a deep, arched and pedimented portico on the narrow Sixth Avenue elevation. Along 16th Street, Gibson's building was three bays long; a low dome was placed above this elevation's wider, central bay. On the interior the dome contained skylights, and a long central bank island was placed below. Robertson could very well have borrowed Gibson's solution for the elevation and interior plan, resolving Gibson's nascent neo-Classicism in his own New

York Savings Bank.

The Architects

R.H. Robertson was a distinguished and prolific New York architect active during the last three decades of the 19th and first two decades of the 20th century. His designs reflect the major styles current during those years -- the High Victorian Gothic of the 1870s, the Romanesque Revival in the 1880s, and the Academic classicism of the next two decades -- but even during his lifetime the freedom and individuality of his stylistic approach was recognized and admired.

Robert Henderson Robertson (1849-1919) was born and raised in Philadelphia. He graduated from Rutgers College in 1869 and joined Henry A. Sims, the Philadelphia architect, as an apprentice in the same year. Subsequently he moved to New York where he worked both for George B. Post and then Edward Tuckerman Potter. In 1875, after an association with Potter's half-brother, William Appleton Potter, he was taken into partnership with W.A. Potter. Robertson opened his own office five years later. He continued to work into this century but in association with his son T. Markoe Robertson and Potter's nephew, Robertson Burnside Potter.⁸

A survey of Robertson's work reveals he learned from his mentors to create an expedient plan and to build well. In the 1880s the Richardsonian Romanesque was his favorite style. Notable examples include the YWCA (1883) at 7 East 15th Street; the Madison Avenue Methodist Church (1884, demolished) at East 60th Street with its unusual spire -- more watch tower than belfry; St. James Episcopal Church (1887, remodelled in the 1920s by Ralph Adams Cram) at East 71st Street and Madison Avenue; Rutgers Riverside Church (1889, demolished) at West 73rd Street and Broadway; and St. Luke's Episcopal Church (1892), located on Convent Avenue in the Hamilton Heights Historic District. By the early 1890s contemporaries noted that it was Robertson's practice to juxtapose architectural elements, often for picturesque effect. This may be seen in Robertson's work in the Academic Classic style, also. Such buildings include the Academy of Medicine (1889, West 43rd Street, also demolished) with its second story library emphatically expressed on its four-story facade; the tall American Tract Society Building (1894-95) at Nassau and Spruce Streets, crowned with a unique and colossal loggia and hipped roof; the Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, originally St. Paul's Methodist Church (1895-97), a designated New York City Landmark, at West End Avenue and West 86th Street with its bold octagonal campanile and flying buttresses; and the twenty-seven story Park Row Building (1896-99) at 15 Park Row with its twin cupolas, for a time the tallest building in the world.

According to Montgomery Schuyler, the noted late-nineteenth critic, Robertson was more interested in the parts, or "features," of his buildings which, as a consequence, lacked a pleasing unity, "a physiognomy."⁹ But Schuyler overlooked one of Robertson's important strengths; Robertson went to extraordinary lengths to express a building's interior function on its exterior. For him the expression of function was of great importance.

Two other architects are responsible for subsequent alterations and additions to the former New York Savings Bank. George Provot (1869-1936)

was born in New York City but received his early education in France. He graduated from Columbia's School of Architecture in 1889. In 1895 he formed a partnership with Bowen B. Smith and Alexander M. Welch, later a vice-president of the New York Savings Bank.¹⁰ In a collaboration with W.W. Hall and T.M. Hall, speculative builders, they designed a number of houses in Manhattan's Upper East Side Historic District as well as 1009 Fifth Avenue, a designated New York City landmark. The partnership was dissolved in 1908. Though Provot designed the old French Hospital on West 34th Street, he was known for his alteration work as well, including the remodelling of the Brevoort Hotel and his alterations to the New York Savings Bank in 1930.¹¹

At present little is known of Adolf L. Muller, the registered architect whose name appears on the drawings for the 1940 addition north of the bank building along Eighth Avenue and the consequent interior remodelling of the banking hall, as well. He was employed by Halsey, McCormick & Helmer, Inc. at 286 Fifth Avenue. Despite its Manhattan address, this firm is best known for its Brooklyn bank buildings. Foremost among these is the Williamsburg Savings Bank (1927-29), a designated New York City landmark. This firm also designed the Brevoort Savings Bank (1931), at 1281 Fulton Street in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighbourhood and additions to the Dime Savings Bank at 9 DeKalb Avenue in the same year. Twelve years after their initial work for the New York Savings Bank, Muller's name reappears on the plans for the remodelling of the bank's main entrance vestibule.

Construction and Design

In an effort to maximize space, Robertson made good use of the "L" shaped lot (plate 2). A savings institution houses two functions, a public one and an administrative one, requiring two separate spaces. Reserving the 'staff' of the "L" with its Eighth Avenue frontage for the public space, he relegated the bank's officers, clerks and tellers to the "L's" long base, extending from 14th Street deep into the block's interior (plate 2). So that business could continue without interruption, the building was constructed in two campaigns, the public western section first and the administrative eastern soon after.

Within a year depositors could ascend the broad steps from Eighth Avenue and enter the bank through either of the central pair of double doors within the monumental portico (plate 3). Once inside the vast segmentally vaulted space, the depositor would approach the central tellers' counter, a marble "peninsula" projecting into the public space from behind the two monumental, engaged columns and transverse rib, a proscenium, at the junction of the administrative and public spaces (plate 2). The counter's terminal curve was directly below the dome and its drum with stained glass lights. Transactions completed, the depositor could depart through either of the extreme pair of exit doorways.

Subsequent History

In 1940-41 a limestone-faced addition to house expanded services was constructed north of the banking hall, along Eighth Avenue. Upon merging with the Bank for Savings in 1964 the bank became the third largest savings institution in the city, behind The Bowery and Dime Savings Banks, under

the new name The New York Bank for Savings.¹² In 1981 the New York Bank for Savings was bought by the Buffalo (N.Y.) Savings Bank; the name of this new entity was changed to Goldome two years later.¹³ But even before the name was changed the Buffalo Savings Bank elected to sell the building in an effort to cut maintenance costs, taking a five year lease from the new owner, which expired in 1987. The bank was then closed.

Description of the Building's Interior

The plan of the New York Savings Bank is "L" shaped -- the staff of the "L" lying along West 14th Street and its foot projecting into the block from the staff's western end. The designated interior is comprised of the banking room only (plates 4 and 5). The plan of the banking room itself has changed very little since it opened. While two of the banking room's interior elevations -- the south and west walls -- retain much of their original fabric and appearance, the north and east walls have undergone successive remodellings; however, these alterations have neither diminished nor obliterated the banking room's monumental proportions. None of these alterations has encroached upon the segmentally vaulted, coffered plaster ceiling. Most of the wainscoting and the monumental Corinthian order, both of Siena marble (though the capitals are gilded plaster), are intact as well.

The Banking Room

The designated portion of the present banking room interior includes the high, rectangular space within the original major order. The floor is paved with a rose-grey colored marble, except behind the "L" shaped tellers' counter. The counter of the polished beige marble (plate 5), runs parallel to and about fifteen feet from the room's south wall, turning to run parallel and at the same distance from the room's west wall.¹⁴

The applied monumental Corinthian order with unfluted pilasters and engaged columns on high plinths supports the banking room's entablature and coffered ceiling. The plinths, wainscot, engaged columns and pilasters are Sienese marble; the capitals, entablature and ceiling are plaster. The travertine revetment above the Siena marble wainscot on the east, south, west and a portion of the north walls dates from George Provot's 1930 remodelling. The new travertine on the north wall -- in the alcoves, between the superimposed pilasters and facing the third story -- was specified by Adolf Muller in 1940 and again in 1972 to match Provot's. The two engaged columns support an unique transverse rib (plate 5). This proscenium-like feature suggests the original, functional division within the banking room. These columns are engaged to pilasters superimposed upon wider pilasters, but only the columns are accorded a correspondence within the entablature. Centered between the east wall and the proscenium, the small dome alone interrupts the ceiling's precisely coffered texture.

The East Wall

In 1930 George Provot replaced Robertson's four doorways with a single, central doorway.¹⁵ Muller, twenty-two years later, gave this doorway its present Moderne aspect.¹⁶ The only vestige of the original east wall is the row of four windows above the new one-story entrance enclosure.

Although their original bronze grilles have been removed and the two extreme windows have been blocked and faced with matching marble, their original Siena marble architraves, common sill and entablature still remain. The wall surface both above and below the row of windows, was revetted with travertine in 1930. Corner pilasters of Siena marble, part of the monumental order, support the banking room's plaster entablature.

The South Wall

The south wall (plates 4 and 5) retains more of its original fabric than any of the other three walls. The Siena marble wainscot runs the whole length of the south wall, projecting as pedestals for the monumental order. The proscenium element cuts the south wall into two similarly articulated elevations though of unequal widths; a spacious expanse from the east wall to the proscenium (left side - plate 4); and a compressed variation from the proscenium to the west wall (right side - plate 5). Centered within the broader, left hand elevation are three tall windows framed by four Siena marble pilasters with gilded plaster capitals, components of the room's monumental Corinthian order. The window frames and muntins are bronze. The two extreme pilasters are articulated as superimposed -- one upon a wider one (or two broader ones). While this superimposition is articulated in their plinths there is no comparable correspondence in the entablature. These superimposed pilasters serve only to bracket the windows.

Three more tall windows are centered within the right hand-elevation and like those to the left are framed with pilasters. Because of the compact nature of this elevation, these pilasters are incorporated into the attached column and superimposed pilasters of the proscenium on the left and the banking room's southwest corner pilaster on the right. The window frames and muntins are bronze. The remaining wall surface above the wainscot on both sides of the proscenium was revetted with travertine in 1930.

The West Wall

The Siena marble wainscot runs the breadth of the west wall (plate 5). The wall surface, above the wainscot up to the entablature, has been revetted with travertine since 1930. Only the large, open bronze clock face mounted in the middle interrupts this broad, unadorned surface.¹⁷ The circular dial is framed within a square; the spandrels carry anthemion motifs. The Roman numerals and clock hands are not attached to the dial but mounted directly upon the travertine.

The North Wall

Given the banking room's monumental classical ordonnance, a visitor might expect the north wall to reflect the south wall (plates 4 and 5). But the foot of the bank's "L" plan has always been accessible to the banking room and its interior elevation has always reflected its three stories (plate 6). Indeed, the north wall has undergone as many remodelling campaigns as the east wall. Although the proscenium element still divides the north wall into unequal widths, the Siena marble wainscot is apparent only where the pedestals for the monumental order still exist; only the engaged proscenium column, the two extreme, superimposed pilasters opposite their counterparts on the south wall, and the corner pilasters remain. Yet, in spite of the alterations, the overall monumentality has been retained.

The Ceiling

The coffered, plaster ceiling is a uniform segmental vault, interrupted only by the proscenium's transverse rib and the foot of the dome's drum (plates 4 and 5). The deep coffers are enframed in two moldings, the outer a waterleaf and the inner an egg and dart molding. A rosette boss depends from within each coffer.¹⁸ At this writing the ceiling is a darker beige tone; the moldings are gilded; the coffers' interior ground is blue; and the rosette bosses are also the darker beige.¹⁹ The ceiling's design and texture is greatly enhanced by the present uplighting.

The Drum and the Dome

When the space in front of the proscenium was the public space and that beyond it was the territory of the tellers and bank officers, the dome, centered above the projecting tellers' peninsula and the public space defined by the monumental order, was a logical and not unexpected crowning element. Today it is a pleasant surprise. (plate 4).

The drum's foot, articulated as a continuous Greek key fret punctuated at regular intervals with lions' heads and topped with an egg and dart molding, is tangent to the banking room ceiling's segmental vault only on its eastern- and westernmost arcs (plate 7). (The splayed surfaces are unadorned.) A unique order of twenty, short, fluted pilasters comprises the drum's interior elevation. Their capitals are anthemion bands topped with a double egg and dart molding. Small rectangular windows of stained and leaded glass above square, ornamental cast radiator grilles fill the long panels between pilasters. Within the rectangular windows, a central square is framed by pedimental motifs -- a palmette flanked by scrolls in tones of light green, yellow and brown glass. Though this motif is compressed at top and bottom, it is more fully developed on both sides of the square. Their iron grilles are cast in a Roman lattice pattern with disks at all the points of intersection except the central one which carries a rosette. Each grille is crested with an anthemion motif flanked by scrolls, nestled in leaves. Two rosettes appear above the crests. (Within the wall -- behind the grilles and below the window sills -- steam pipes encircle the drum's interior surface.) The pilasters support a continuous entablature distinguished once again by an egg and dart motif. At present the lions' heads, the Greek key fret, the anthemion crestings

and the capitals are gilded. The rest is the beige tone of the banking room ceiling.

Like the ceiling coffers, those articulating the dome's inner surface all enclose rosette bosses. As the dome rises each range of coffering diminishes in height, width and depth. As a consequence only the coffers on the lowest range are framed like the ceiling coffers, in two moldings -- egg and dart within waterleaf; the rest have but a single egg and dart molding. The central rosette boss at the top -- from which the chandelier depends -- is framed with an annular panel decorated with ten small rosettes. Egg and dart molding ornaments the bevel of this panel. Like the banking room ceiling at present, the dome's coffer moldings and rosettes are gilded; the interior ground of the coffers is blue and the dome's ribs are the darker beige.

Report prepared by
Charles Savage
Research Department

Report edited by
Marjorie Pearson
Director of Research

Notes

1. For much of the time the former New York Bank for Savings building has stood on the northwest corner of Eighth Avenue and West 14th Street, the building was known for its builder the New York Savings Bank. Not until 1964 did the bank change its name to reflect the merger between it and The Bank for Savings. Because both the building records and subsequent alterations documentation reflect the name of the bank's builder, rather than either of the name's subsequent mutations, the building is referred to as the New York Savings Bank throughout this report.
2. Works Progress Administration, New York City Guide, (1939; repr. New York, 1970), 145-151.
3. The bank's chief financial resources, allowing its depositors a satisfactory return, were Federal, State, municipal and railroad mortgages and bonds.
4. Portions of this section have been adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission, Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company Building Designation Report (LP-1633), prepared by Elisa Urbanelli, (New York, 1988).
5. A.C. David, "Private Residences for Banking Firms," Architectural Record, 14 (July 1903), 13-14. See also Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Milmartin and John Massengale, New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890 -1915 (New York, 1983), 177.
6. Two McKim, Mead & White commissions, rendered in the Classical idiom, of which Robertson might have been aware were the Howard Whittemore Memorial Library in Naugatuck, Conn. and the Walker Gallery at Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine. While the limestone Whittemore Library does not have a dome, it does have a truncated, crested drum. The Walker Gallery is a small domed pavilion of red brick dressed with limestone. McKim, Mead & White's Bowery Bank commission (1896) would certainly have been known to Robertson. Of these three the Whittemore Library's major (Ionic) order, antae and drum suggest that its crisp and angular Classicism may have been of some use to Robertson.
7. Gibson is better known for his ecclesiastic commissions. This bank was demolished in the late 1950s.
8. Robertson joined the AIA in 1873, the New York chapter the following year, and became a Fellow in 1885; he joined the Architectural League in 1886.

Portions of the discussion of Robertson have been adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Architects Appendix," Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (LP1051), Marjorie Pearson, ed. (New York, 1981), 1325-1328. See Landau, E.T. and W.A. Potter, (New York, 1979) 70 - 81, for a discussion of Robertson's early professional career.

9. For his comprehensive profile of Robertson, see Schuyler, "Works of R.H. Robertson," Architectural Record, 6 (Oct.-Dec. 1896) 184 - 219. Robertson was by no means the only architect engaged in what Schuyler called the "free architecture" or Independent Style. Schuyler may have chosen to profile Robertson because he epitomized the Independent Style -- with which, one senses -- Schuyler had little sympathy. But that Schuyler would treat Robertson's work at all is a measure of Robertson's success.
10. He designed St. Stephen's Church, Kingsbridge and was responsible for the restorations of the Hamilton Grange and the Dyckman House.
11. Provot obituary, New York Times, July 10, 1936. He was active in the real estate market also.
12. The Bank for Savings building at the southwest corner of 22nd Street and Park Avenue South remained a business office of the new bank until 1983-84 when it was gutted to become a screen fronting the lower stories of an apartment tower.
13. In 1981, following the Federal deregulation of banks, the Federal Deposit Insurance Comm. invited stronger banks to bid on weaker (over-extended) ones. The Buffalo Savings Bank merged with the New York Bank for Savings in 1981 and the Union Dime Savings Bank a year later. The name Goldome is derived from the gilded dome crowning the Buffalo bank's home office building designed by Green & Wicks (1900-01).
14. See Appendix g.
15. See Appendix e.
16. See Appendix h.
17. See Appendix e. In 1940 the original officers' platform with its partitioned offices was removed. Three equidistant grilles just above the wainscot (part of the forced air heating/cooling system installed in 1973) also break the wall surface but without the decorative character of the clockface.
18. The ceiling is intact, except for one coffer where the rosette boss has been removed, leaving only an uneven hole. This coffer is immediately south of the center coffer abutting the eastern arc of the drum's foot.
19. There is no reason to believe that these are the original colors. Scraping for paint samples may be a way to determine the original colors.

i) November 6, 1952

Alteration 66-52.

Main entrance vestibule: revolving door to be removed; new vestibule to be constructed with 7'-0" x 3'-0" tempered glass doors installed on inside and outside; vestibule to have new marble walls and concrete ceiling. Restrooms eliminated and windows sealed. The main entrance columnar enframing and broken pediment were removed. The transom grille was removed.

North Wall, westerly elevation - 1st floor:
new paying and receiving unit installed; new marble, bronze and glass wickets to match those on hand.

- 2nd floor:
floor brought forward flush with the north wall of the banking room to create space for the Real-Estate Department; new travertine pilasters, new bronze railing constructed from present officers' platform on 1st floor.

- 3rd floor:
new travertine facing to match existing work. The beehive cartouche shown on the plan (B-h) is no longer there.

easterly elevation - 1st floor:
new checkwriting desks skirting around extant pilasters into new addition.
New marble floor, banking room; three chandeliers suspended from ceiling and within dome.

j) May 18, 1972

Demolition Permit 357-70.

Muller's 1940 addition demolished. The cuts through the north wall of the banking room blocked and faced with travertine to match.

Appendix: Building and Alteration Chronology, Interior

- a) June 14, 1896 New Building #1096. One - three-story bank building and janitor's apartment.
- b) March 29, 1897 Amendment to application for the temporary entrance on 14th St. Accompanying explanation indicated that the building was being constructed in two sections.
- c) April 10, 1897 Application for temporary flooring to be replaced by marble and in part by a raised platform (the officers' platform at the western end of the banking room).
- d) October 4, 1897 Application to amend plans to allow insertion of an I-beam under the floor.
- e) May 2, 1930 Plans - George Provot, Archt., 22 East 17th St. East wall alterations: Original four door (two entrances, two exits) configuration, the broad transom and the heated vestibule partitions removed; new vestibule built out into the banking room, with but one central door. New door enframed by columns and a broken pediment. Above and behind the pediment only a portion of the transom was retained and was covered with a bronze grille. Except for two bronze radiator grilles, new Siena marble facing covered the front of this interior addition.
- f) June 23, 1930 Alteration application 1022-30 approved. Entrance to be rearranged; central doorway to be formed by removal of central pier. Part of the open vestibule to be enclosed in new walls and toilet rooms on each side for men and women depositors, capped with new bronze cornices.
- g) November 20, 1940 Alteration application 3395-40. Three story addition: Old walls, north side of banking room cut out for access to new addition. Officers' platform, westerly section of banking room, to be removed. Old peninsular tellers' counter to be removed. New tellers' counter to be installed fronting south and west walls. Adolf L. Muller, R.A., Halsey, McCormick & Helmer, Inc.
- h) January 15, 1952 New plans for interior alterations: main entrance vestibule; westerly elevation and north wall.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this interior, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the former New York Bank for Savings Interior consisting of the banking room, and the fixtures and interior components of this space, including wall surfaces (including engaged Corinthian columns, pilasters, entablature and wainscot), ceiling surfaces (including the plaster coffered, segmental vault), dome surfaces (including the drum faced with alternating pilasters and windows of stained glass above cast-iron lattice radiator grilles) has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and the Interior or parts thereof are thirty years old or more, and that the Interior is one which has been customarily open and accessible to the public, and to which the public has been customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the New York Savings Bank interior, built in two sections in 1896-97, was designed by R.H. Robertson in the Academic Classic style popularized by the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893); that the interior is expressive of Robertson's functional designs and gains significance because it is so intrinsically linked with the exterior, reflecting the exterior volume in the interior space; that for its size the scale of the interior is monumental; that its materials -- marble, bronze, stained glass, and plaster -- and the workmanship they represent are exceptional; that the engaged Corinthian columns and pilasters, coffered ceiling, the drum and dome possess fine ornamental detail; that subsequent alterations to meet the changing needs of the bank have not compromised Robertson's design, retaining the banking room's spacious scale and much of its original interior finishes.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, 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 an Interior Landmark the former New York Bank for Savings Interior, consisting of the banking room, and the fixtures and interior components of this space, including wall surfaces (including engaged Corinthian columns, pilasters, entablatures and wainscot), ceiling surfaces (including the plaster coffered, segmental vault), dome surfaces (including the drum faced with alternating pilasters and windows of stained glass above cast-iron lattice radiator grilles), 81 Eighth Avenue a/k/a 301 West 14th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 738, Lot 33, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Annual Report of the Superintendent of Banks, 1900. Albany: James B. Lyon, State Printer, 1901.

Barney Marble Co. [catalogue]. Swanton, Vt., c.1890.

Gramercy Graphic, 23, (Summer 1963), 4-5.

Kneerim, Arthur, Old New York: Our Neighborhood. New York: The New York Savings Bank, [1932].

Landau, Sarah Bradford. Edward T. and William A. Potter: American Victorian Architects. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979.

_____, "R.H. Robertson." Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, vol. 3. New York: Macmillan Publishing Inc., The Free Press, 1982, 591.

"New York Bank for Savings." Research information prepared by Rosemary Ballard for Beyer, Blinder, Belle, Architects, 1987. Submitted to Landmarks Preservation Commission.

[Provot, George. Obituary]. New York Times, July 10, 1936.

Real-Estate Record & Guide, July, 18, 1896, 105.

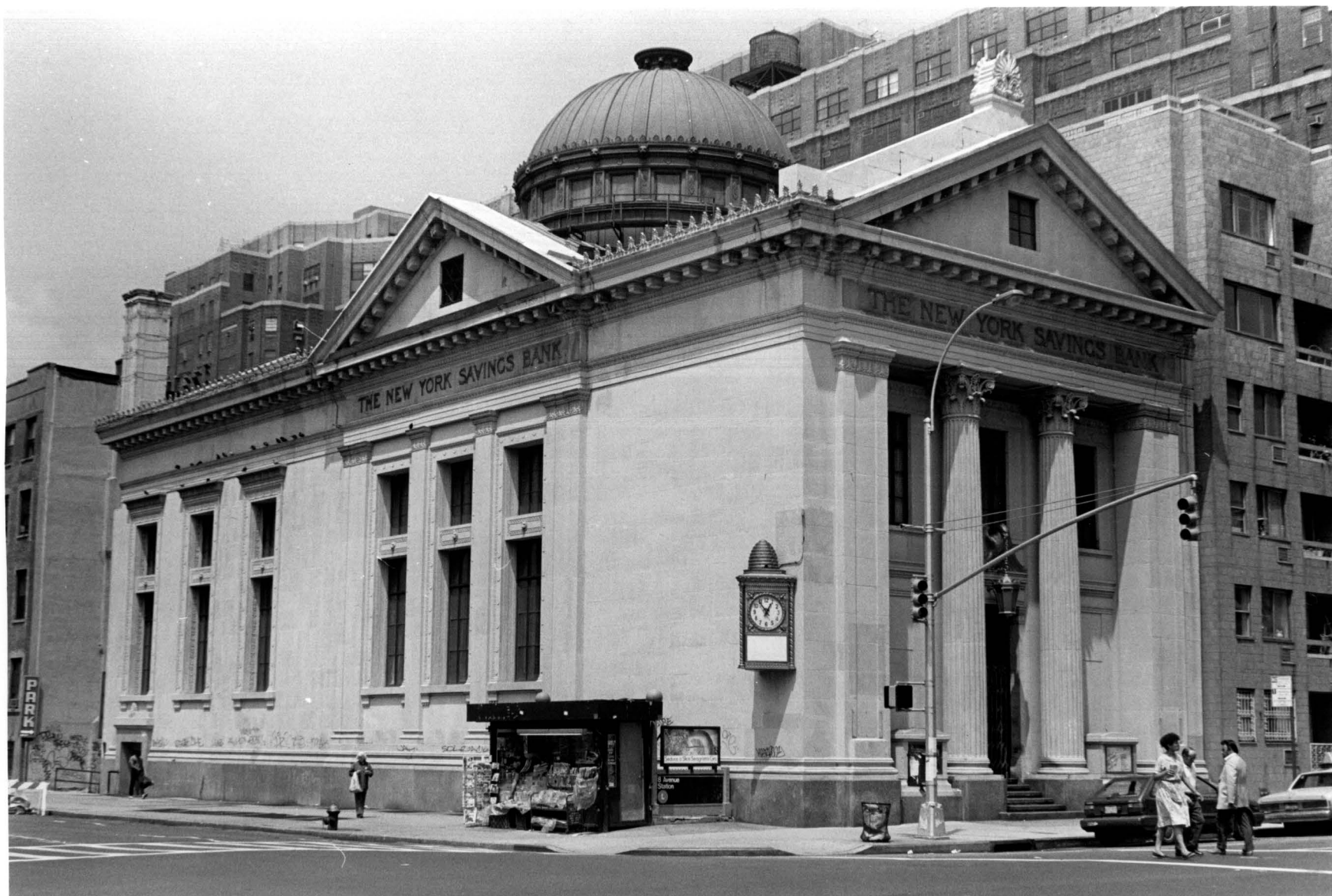
Rohdenburg, Theodor Karl. History of the School of Architecture, Columbia University. New York: Columbia University Press, 1954.

Schuyler, Montgomery, "Works of R.H. Robertson." Architectural Record, 6 (Oct.-Dec. 1896), 184 - 219.

The Book of Vermont Marble. Proctor, Vt.: Vermont Marble Co., 192-.

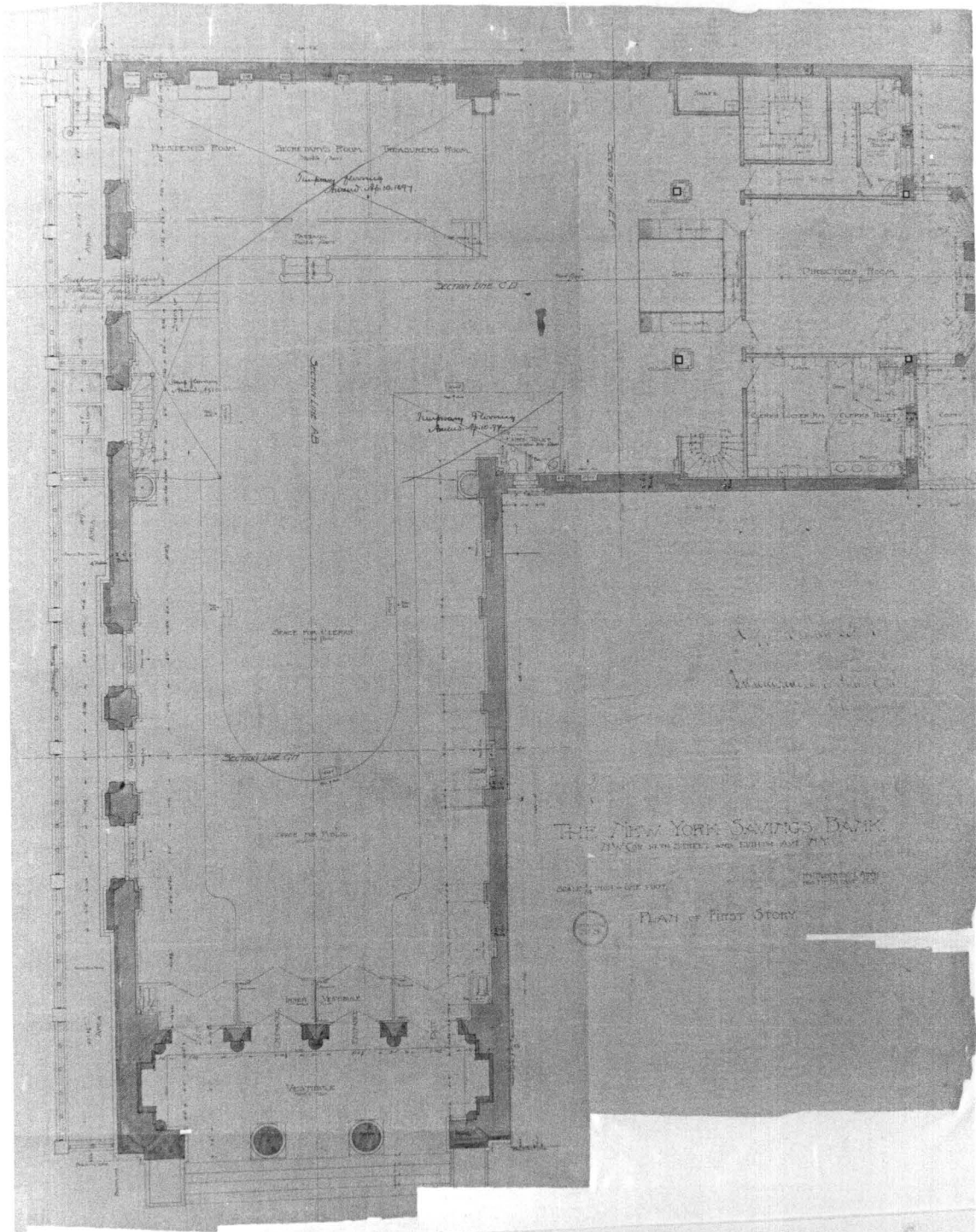
Vanderkelen, Brian. Legal Department, Goldome. Conversation, April 1, 1988.

Works Progress Administration. New York City Guide. 1939. Reprint. New York: Octagon Books, 1970.



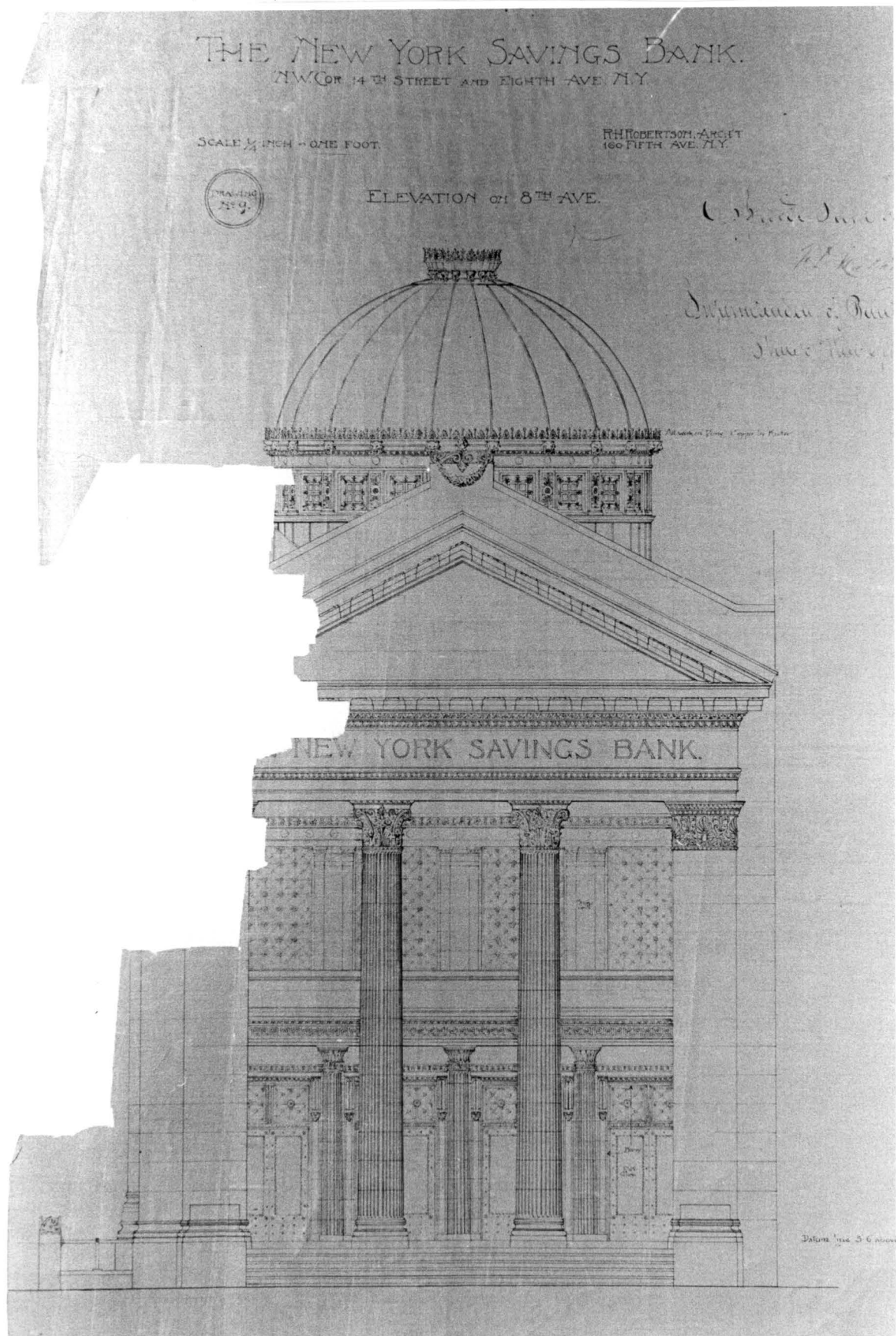
(Carl Forster)

Plate 1. The former New York Savings Bank, east and south elevations
- Eighth Avenue and West Fourteenth Street.



(Carl Forster)

Plate 2. Original plan of the First Story.
Municipal Archives.



(Carl Forster)

Plate 3. Original Eighth Avenue elevation.
Municipal Archives.



(Carl Forster)

Plate 4. Interior of the Banking Room, looking east
toward Eighth Avenue and the main entrance.



Plate 5. Interior of the Banking Room looking west.

(Carl Forster)

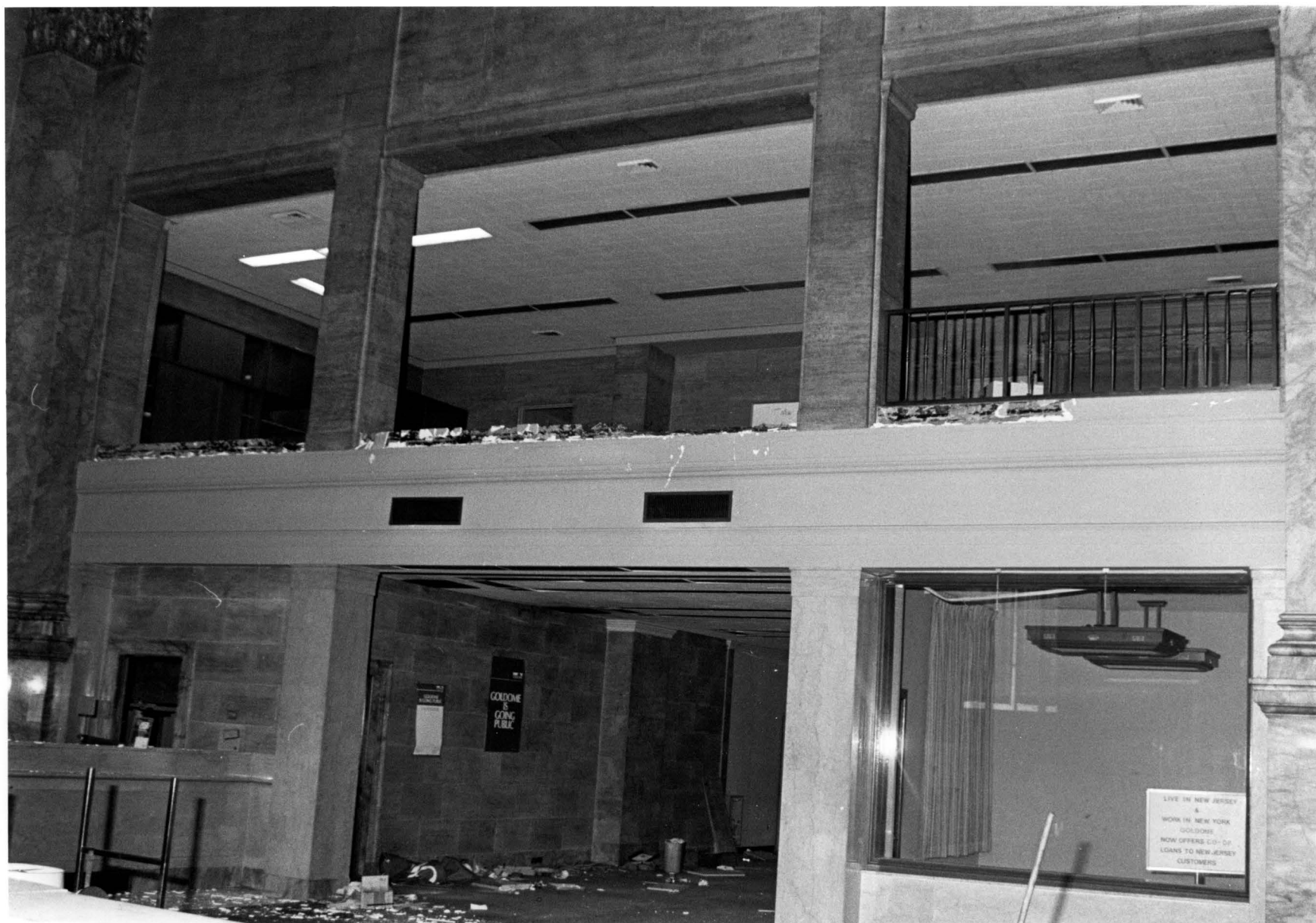


Plate 6. Detail of the Banking Room's north wall -- the elevation to the left (west) of the proscenium. (1988)

(Carl Forster)



(Carl Forster)

Plate 7. Interior of the drum and dome.

ATTACHMENT TO LP-1635

Landmarks Preservation Commission
June 21, 1988, Designation List 205
LP-1635A

NEW YORK SAVINGS BANK (later New York Bank for Savings; now Central Carpet Company), first floor interior, consisting of the banking room and the fixtures and interior components of this space, including wall surfaces (including engaged Corinthian columns, pilasters, entablature, and wainscot), ceiling surfaces (including the coffered plaster, segmental vault), dome surfaces (including the drum faced with windows of stained glass above cast-iron lattice radiator grilles); 81 Eighth Avenue (aka 301 West 14th Street), Manhattan.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 738, Lot 33.

Designated a New York City Interior Landmark as the former New York Bank for Savings Interior on June 21, 1988.

On May 14, 1996, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed amendment of the Interior Landmark designation of the New York Savings Bank (later New York Bank for Savings; now Central Carpet Company) interior to incorporate the underscoring of the significant features identified in the Description section of the designation report as specified in the Rules for Alterations to Designated Bank Interiors (Item No. 7). The hearing was advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses testified in favor of the amendment. Three representatives of various banks stated that they had no objections to the proposed amendment. There were no speakers in opposition to the amendment.

Description of the Interior of the New York Savings Bank*

The plan of the New York Savings Bank is "L" shaped -- the staff of the "L" lying along West 14th Street and its foot projecting into the block from the staff's western end. The designated interior is comprised of the banking room only (plates 4 and 5). The plan of the banking room itself has changed very little since it opened. While two of the banking room's interior elevations --the south and west walls -- retain much of their original fabric and appearance, the north and east walls have undergone successive remodellings; however, these alterations have neither diminished nor obliterated the banking room's monumental proportions. None of these alterations has encroached upon the segmentally vaulted, coffered plaster ceiling. Most of the wainscoting and the monumental Corinthian order, both of Siena marble (though the capitals are gilded plaster), are intact as well.

* This description has been excerpted and slightly modified from the original designation report for LP-1635. The plate numbers are those for the original report. Significant features in this interior space are underscored as specified in the Rules for Alterations to Designated Bank Interiors. "Significant features" are defined in Section 9-02 of the Rules.

ATTACHMENT TO LP-1635

The Banking Room

The designated portion of the present banking room interior includes the high, rectangular space within the original major order. The floor is paved with a rose-gray colored marble.¹

The applied monumental Corinthian order with unfluted pilasters and engaged columns on high plinths supports the banking room's entablature and coffered ceiling. The plinths, wainscot, engaged columns and pilasters are Sienese marble; the capitals, entablature and ceiling are plaster. The travertine revetment above the Siena marble wainscot on the east, south, west and a portion of the north walls dates from George Provot's 1930 remodelling. The new travertine on the north wall -- in the alcoves, between the superimposed pilasters and facing the third story -- was specified by Adolf Muller in 1940 and again in 1972 to match Provot's. The two engaged columns support an unique transverse rib (plate 5). This proscenium-like feature suggests the original, functional division within the banking room. These columns are engaged to pilasters superimposed upon wider pilasters, but only the columns are accorded a correspondence within the entablature. Centered between the east wall and the proscenium, the small dome alone interrupts the ceiling's precisely coffered texture.

The East Wall. In 1930 George Provot replaced Robertson's four doorways with a single, central doorway.² Muller, twenty-two years later, gave this doorway its present Moderne aspect.³ The only vestige of the original east wall is the row of four windows above the new one-story entrance enclosure. Although their original bronze grilles have been removed and the two extreme windows have been blocked and faced with matching marble, their original Siena marble architraves, common sill and entablature still remain. The wall surface both above and below the row of windows, was revetted with travertine in 1930. Corner pilasters of Siena marble, part of the monumental order, support the banking room's plaster entablature.

The South Wall. The south wall (plates 4 and 5) retains more of its original fabric than any of the other three walls. The Siena marble wainscot runs the whole length of the south wall, projecting as pedestals for the monumental order. The proscenium element cuts the south wall into two similarly articulated elevations though of unequal widths; a spacious expanse from the east wall to the proscenium (left side - plate 4); and a compressed variation from the proscenium to the west wall (right side - plate 5). Centered within the broader, left hand elevation are three tall windows framed by four Siena marble pilasters with gilded plaster capitals, components of the room's monumental Corinthian order. The window frames and muntins are bronze. The two extreme pilasters are articulated as superimposed-- one upon a wider one (or two broader ones). While this superimposition is articulated in their plinths there is no comparable correspondence in the entablature. These superimposed pilasters serve only to bracket the windows.

Three more tall windows are centered within the right hand elevation and like those to the left are framed with pilasters. Because of the compact nature of this elevation, these pilasters are incorporated into the attached column and superimposed pilasters of the proscenium on the left and the banking room's southwest corner pilaster on the right. The window frames and muntins are bronze. The remaining wall surface above the wainscot on both sides of the proscenium was revetted with travertine in 1930.

ATTACHMENT TO LP-1635

The West Wall. The Siena marble wainscot runs the breadth of the west wall (plate 5). The wall surface, above the wainscot up to the entablature, has been revetted with travertine since 1930. Only the large, open bronze clock face mounted in the middle interrupts this broad, unadorned surface.⁴ The circular dial is framed within a square; the spandrels carry anthemia motifs. The Roman numerals and clock hands are not attached to the dial but mounted directly upon the travertine.

The North Wall. Given the banking room's monumental classical *ordonnance*, a visitor might expect the north wall to reflect the south wall (plates 4 and 5). But the foot of the bank's "L" plan has always been accessible to the banking room and its interior elevation has always reflected its three stories (plate 6). Indeed, the north wall has undergone as many remodelling campaigns as the east wall. Although the proscenium element still divides the north wall into unequal widths, the Siena marble wainscot is apparent only where the pedestals for the monumental order still exist; only the engaged proscenium column, the two extreme, superimposed pilasters opposite their counterparts on the south wall, and the corner pilasters remain. Yet, in spite of the alterations, the overall monumentality has been retained.

The Ceiling. The coffered, plaster ceiling is a uniform segmental vault, interrupted only by the proscenium's transverse rib and the foot of the dome's drum (plates 4 and 5). The deep coffers are enframed in two moldings, the outer a waterleaf and the inner an egg and dart molding. A rosette boss depends from within each coffer.⁵

The Drum and the Dome. When the space in front of the proscenium was the public space and that beyond it was the territory of the tellers and bank officers, the dome, centered above the projecting tellers' peninsula and the public space defined by the monumental order, was a logical and not unexpected crowning element. Today it is a pleasant surprise (plate 4).

The drum's foot, articulated as a continuous Greek key fret punctuated at regular intervals with lions' heads and topped with an egg and dart molding, is tangent to the banking room ceiling's segmental vault only on its eastern- and westernmost arcs (plate 7). (The splayed surfaces are unadorned.) A unique order of twenty, short, fluted pilasters comprises the drum's interior elevation. Their capitals are anthemion bands topped with a double egg and dart molding. Small rectangular windows of stained and leaded glass above square, ornamental cast-iron radiator grilles fill the long panels between pilasters. Within the rectangular windows, a central square is framed by pedimental motifs -- a palmette flanked by scrolls in tones of light green, yellow and brown glass. Though this motif is compressed at top and bottom, it is more fully developed on both sides of the square. The iron grilles are cast in a Roman lattice pattern with disks at all the points of intersection except the central one which carries a rosette. Each grille is crested with an anthemion motif flanked by scrolls, nestled in leaves. Two rosettes appear above the crests. (Within the wall -- behind the grilles and below the window sills -- steam pipes encircle the drum's interior surface.) The pilasters support a continuous entablature distinguished once again by an egg and dart motif.⁶

Like the ceiling coffers, the coffers articulating the dome's inner surface all enclose rosette bosses. As the dome rises, each range of coffering diminishes in height, width and depth. As a consequence

ATTACHMENT TO LP-1635

only the coffers on the lowest range are framed like the ceiling coffers, in two moldings -- egg and dart within waterleaf; the rest have but a single egg and dart molding. The central rosette boss at the top -- from which the chandelier depends -- is framed with an annular panel decorated with ten small rosettes. Egg and dart molding ornaments the bevel of this panel.⁷

NOTES

- 1 . At the time of designation, the space contained an "L"- shaped tellers' counter. The counter of polished beige marble (plate 5), ran parallel to and about fifteen feet from the room's south wall, turning to run parallel and at the same distance from the room's west wall. See Appendix - g. This counter was removed pursuant to Certificate of Appropriateness 94-458, and a new cashiers' station was installed for the current tenant.
- 2 . See Appendix - e.
- 3 . See Appendix - h.
- 4 . See Appendix - e. In 1940 the original officers' platform with its partitioned offices was removed. Three equidistant grilles just above the wainscot (part of the forced air heating/cooling system installed in 1973) also break the wall surface but without the decorative character of the clock face.
- 5 . At the time of designation, the ceiling was a darker beige tone; the moldings were gilded; the coffers' interior ground was blue; and the rosette bosses were also the darker beige. It is unlikely that these were the original colors.
- 6 . At the time of designation, the lions' heads, the Greek key fret, the anthemion crestings, and the capitals were gilded. The rest was the beige tone of the banking room ceiling.
- 7 . Like the banking room ceiling at the time of designation, the dome's coffer moldings and rosettes were gilded; the interior ground of the coffers was blue, and the dome's ribs were the darker beige.

Appendix: Building and Alteration Chronology, Interior

- a) June 14, 1896 New Building #1096. One three-story bank building and janitor's apartment.
- b) March 29, 1897 Amendment to application for the temporary entrance on 14th St. Accompanying explanation indicated that the building was being constructed in two sections.
- c) April 10, 1897 Application for temporary flooring to be replaced by marble and in part by a raised platform (the officers' platform at the western end of the banking room).
- d) October 4, 1897 Application to amend plans to allow insertion of an I-beam under the floor.

ATTACHMENT TO LP-1635

- e) May 2, 1930 Plans - George Provot, Archt., 22 East 17th St. East wall alterations: Original four door (two entrances, two exits) configuration, the broad transom and the heated vestibule partitions removed; new vestibule built out into the banking room, with but one central door. New door enframed by columns and a broken pediment. Above and behind the pediment only a portion of the transom was retained and was covered with a bronze grille. Except for two bronze radiator grilles, new Siena marble facing covered the front of this interior addition.
- f) June 23, 1930 Alteration application 1022-30 approved. Entrance to be rearranged; central doorway to be formed by removal of central pier. Part of the open vestibule to be enclosed in new walls and toilet rooms on each side for men and women depositors, capped with new bronze cornices.
- g) November 20, 1940 Alteration application 3395-40. Three story addition: Old walls, north side of banking room cut out for access to new addition. Officers' platform, westerly section of banking room, to be removed. Old peninsular tellers' counter to be removed. New tellers' counter to be installed fronting south and west walls. Adolf L. Muller, R. A. , Halsey, McCormick & Helmer, Inc.
- h) January 15, 1952 New plans for interior alterations: main entrance vestibule; westerly elevation and north wall.
- i) November 6, 1952 Alteration Application 66-52. *Main entrance vestibule*: Revolving door to be removed; new vestibule to be constructed with 7'-0" x 3'-0" tempered glass doors installed on inside and outside; vestibule to have new marble walls and concrete ceiling. Restrooms eliminated and windows sealed. The main entrance columnar enframement and broken pediment were removed. The transom grille was removed.

North Wall, westerly elevation 1st floor: new paying and receiving unit installed; new marble, bronze and glass wickets to match those on hand. 2nd floor: floor brought forward flush with the north wall of the banking room to create space for the Real-Estate Department; new travertine pilasters, new bronze railing constructed from present officers' platform on 1st floor. 3rd floor: new travertine facing to match existing work. The beehive cartouche shown on the plan (B-h) is no longer there.

North wall, easterly elevation 1st floor: new check writing desks skirting around extant pilasters into new addition.

ATTACHMENT TO LP-1635

New marble floor, banking room; three chandeliers suspended from ceiling and within dome.

- j) May 18, 1972 Demolition Permit 357-70. Muller's 1940 addition demolished. The cuts through the north wall of the banking room blocked and faced with travertine to match.

ATTACHMENT TO LP-1635

FINDINGS AND AMENDED DESIGNATION

The Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Interior of the New York Savings Bank (later New York Bank for Savings; now Central Carpet Company) has significant features as identified in the Description section of the designation report (LP-1635) as designated by the Commission on June 21, 1988.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provision of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 amends its designation report to incorporate underscoring of the significant features in the Interior identified in the Description section of the designation report as specified in the Rules for Alterations to Designated Bank Interiors.