

WESTERN UNION BUILDING

60 Hudson Street, Manhattan. Built 1928-30. Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 144, Lot 40.

On September 19, 1989, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street, Manhattan, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 35). The building owner's representative requested that the hearing be continued. Five witnesses testified in favor of designation. The hearing was continued to December 12, 1989 (Item No. 13). At that hearing, the owner's representative requested another continuance, and the hearing was continued to April 3, 1990 (Item No. 13). At the third hearing, after discussing the special nature of the use of the building by communications firms, the owner's representative again requested that the hearing be continued. One witness testified in favor of designation. The hearing was closed and the record was left open for sixty days. The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law.¹

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Western Union Building (1928-30), designed by Ralph Walker, one of New York's foremost architects of the period, is a recognized achievement in modernistic skyscraper design. The building is characteristic of a group of communications buildings designed by Walker in the late 1920s, primarily for the telephone companies, in which he developed a distinctive design approach related to the contemporary Art Deco style. The design of the Western Union Building was influenced by the work of the German and Dutch Expressionist architects, and drew upon Walker's well-defined design theory emphasizing harmony and unity. The integrated aesthetic of form, material, and ornamentation incorporates such elements as patterned brickwork, dramatic entrances, faceted wall planes and trim, and complex and asymmetrical massing. The innovative, cliff-like form of the Western Union Building departs from the shape of the site and includes a low screen that conforms to the Hudson Street lot line. The exterior brick walls are carefully articulated in a textured, curtain-like manner, parting as proscenium-like openings at the ground story. The building was among the first to have a graded brick color scheme, from dark at the bottom to light at the upper stories, which was "a pleasing exaggeration of the natural play of light." Commissioned by Newcomb Carlton, president of the Western Union Telegraph Company, the new headquarters building allowed the consolidation of all operations in one location, "the largest telegraph building in the world"; the modernistic design helped to reestablish a corporate identity for Western Union after its dominance by the American Telephone & Telegraph Company. The Western Union Building remains in use as a communications center, housing both equipment and offices.

The Western Union Telegraph Company²

Founded in Rochester, N.Y., in 1851, the New York and Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Company soon consolidated with other telegraph companies and in 1856 adopted the name Western Union Telegraph Company. In 1861, at the time Western Union absorbed the two remaining major competing telegraph companies, the corporate headquarters was moved from Rochester to 145 Broadway, New York City. In the next few decades Western Union evolved as one of the first modern nation-wide corporations, providing valuable communication service, both in this country through the transcontinental telegraph established in 1861 and, beginning in the 1880s, abroad via trans-Atlantic cables. In 1875 the Western Union Telegraph Company more firmly established its presence in New York City with the completion of a headquarters and operations building at 195 Broadway designed in the flamboyant French Second Empire style by George B. Post. The architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler considered the ten-story Western Union Building to be one of the first American skyscrapers, along with the Tribune Building (Richard Morris Hunt, 1873-75). These buildings, which recognized the possibilities of the elevator, were among the first conspicuously tall buildings to rise above the general level of the skyline in New York City. The Western Union Building, erected by one of the first large corporations in the country, represented one of earliest buildings conceived of as a prominent corporate headquarters. In 1890 a fire destroyed the upper stories, which were redesigned by Henry J. Hardenbergh and rebuilt by 1892.³

After the development of the telephone as a voice communication system that both competed with and complemented the written record of the telegraph, the Western Union Company and the Bell Telephone system and, later, the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, dominated the communications field in the United States in a complicated intertwined history. In New York City, the interrelationship of the communications giants involved the construction and occupancy of facilities in addition to financial and managerial links. In 1879 the Western Union Telegraph Company and the National Bell Telephone Company (which became the American Bell

Telephone Company in 1880) entered into an agreement which eliminated Western Union from the telephone business, in exchange for revenues from some Bell operations, and provided that the Bell system would not compete with Western Union in the telegraph field or do business with any rival telegraph company. In 1908 AT&T, which had by the turn of the century become the central institution of the American Bell Telephone Company operations, acquired a controlling interest in Western Union, further uniting the two coast-to-coast communications systems. This merger was prompted by the goal of providing better and cheaper service, as well as preserving the near monopoly the corporations had on rapid long distance communication. During this period of joint control, the facilities were updated and expanded with the construction of a new office building at 195 Broadway (William Welles Bosworth, 1912-1924), shared by both companies, and an operations facility known as the Walker Lispenard Building at 24 Walker Street (Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz and McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, 1911-14, incorporated into the Long Distance Building in 1930-32), where the Western Union Company occupied the top five floors. Even though the first portion erected of the impressive new building at 195 Broadway was known as the Western Union Building, the facility, which occupies the entire Broadway frontage between Dey and Fulton Streets and most of the block between Broadway and Church, soon became known as the AT&T Building; hence Western Union's identity with its long-time Broadway location was weakened and there was no longer any building known exclusively as the Western Union headquarters building. Under increasing pressure from the U.S. Justice Department with regard to the Sherman anti-trust law, in 1913 AT&T began to divest itself of holdings in Western Union, although the executive offices of both corporations remained at 195 Broadway and both companies continued to occupy the operations facility, the Walker Lispenard Building.⁴

Newcomb Carlton (1869-1953) became president of the Western Union Telegraph Company in 1914. Carlton had managed Bell Telephone operations in Buffalo, N.Y., and facilities of the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company and was for several years

manager of British Westinghouse. Carlton had served as vice-president in charge of operations of Western Union during the years that it was controlled by AT&T. During his tenure as president of Western Union, from 1914 to 1933, Carlton supervised the modernization of equipment and expansion of operations, most notably in the overseas cable services and in the construction of a new headquarters building.

"The Largest Telegraph Building in the World"⁵

In 1924 Western Union began to acquire lots in the block bounded by West Broadway and Hudson, Thomas, and Worth Streets as plans were initiated for the construction of a new operations building. The Hudson Street site was close to both the major clients of Western Union in lower Manhattan -- the Stock Exchange, the several commodity exchanges, and the Wall Street ticker service -- and the operations facility at 24 Walker Street; the proximity of the new location in the relatively inexpensive area north of Washington Market, now known as Tribeca, would facilitate the change-over of the many telegraph lines and the twenty-five pneumatic tubes that connected the Walker Street facility to branch offices from the Battery to 42nd Street. In May, 1928, the firm formally announced the construction of its new building at 60 Hudson Street which was to be the largest telegraph building in the world.⁶

The steel-frame structure, designed by Ralph Walker of the firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, was constructed by Marc Eidlitz & Son, and because of the complex technical requirements of the building -- precaution against fire, theft, and interference from outside power lines, the seventy million feet of wire, and the thirty miles of conduit in the building -- it took two years to complete. The building had its own private power plant and an innovative ventilation system. In early October, 1930, the "cutting over" of the telegraph lines from the Walker Street building to the 60 Hudson Street facility, without a break in service, was considered a tactical and engineering event of note.

The new "Telegraph Capitol of America" housed the executive offices, the general headquarters of the Metropolitan and Eastern Division, and the New York City operating

terminal, and served as "the heart of a nerve system of wires and cables reaching to every corner of the nation and the world." Five floors -- the eleventh through the fifteenth -- were utilized for the continuously operating telegraph rooms, outfitted with all new updated equipment: multiplex telegraph transmitters, simplex printers, telephone equipment, the stock quotation ticker, the marine ticker, and the time signal apparatus.⁷ Other floors were used for routing and regulating the use of the wire system in the building and the testing of equipment, training schools for operators, employee lounges, and offices. The second floor and part of the mezzanine were devoted to the use of the messenger service with classrooms for high school study and mechanical trades, a library, and a gymnasium. The ninth floor was occupied by research and experimental laboratories and the presidential suite occupied the crowning twenty-fourth floor. On the main floor, bisected by a corridor from Hudson Street to West Broadway, were located an auditorium for lectures to company personnel, a cafeteria for employees, and several retail spaces.

The construction of such a technologically advanced and modernistically designed headquarters building for the Western Union Company was part of a trend involving communications firms and public utilities throughout the country. In addition to the similar buildings constructed in New York and New Jersey, other regional telephone companies erected modernistic skyscrapers, such as the San Francisco Telephone Building (J.R. Miller & T.L. Pflueger, 1925) and the Ohio Bell Telephone Company Building in Cleveland (Hubbell & Benes Company, 1927). The Alabama Power Company Building in Birmingham (Warren, Knight & Davis, 1925) and the Pennsylvania Power and Light Building in Allentown (Helmle, Corbett & Harrison, 1929-30) attest to the extension of this trend to smaller cities as well. Such a modernistic skyscraper allowed the consolidation of expanded operations in a more efficient facility and helped to establish a corporate identity compatible with the modernity of services provided. The press reports of the construction of the Western Union Building captured the public's fascination with modern technology.

Ralph Walker and Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker⁸

For the design of its headquarters building, the Western Union Company chose Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, an architectural firm which had a long history of work for the telephone company, beginning in 1885 with the firm's founding partner Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz (1853-1921). Ralph Walker, the principal designer of the firm in the 1920s, is considered the designer of the Western Union Building. This commission had a program similar to those of the recently erected Barclay-Vesey Building for the New York Telephone Company (a designated New York City Landmark) and the New Jersey Bell Headquarters Building in Newark, both designed by the firm. No doubt the experience of the Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker firm in handling the technical requirements for such communications buildings was a major factor in its selection. In fact, it appears that this consideration was more important to Western Union than constructing a new headquarters building that would be readily distinguishable from the buildings of the telephone companies.

Andrew McKenzie (1861-1926) joined Eidlitz in 1902, and the partnership of Eidlitz & McKenzie was active until 1909. Stephen Voorhees (1879-1965) was born near Rocky Hill, New Jersey, and was educated as a civil engineer at Princeton University. In 1902 he began to practice with Eidlitz & McKenzie as an engineer and superintendent of construction. German-born Paul Gmelin (1859-1937) studied in Stuttgart. He came to the United States as a draftsman, was briefly associated with McKim, Mead & White, and then joined the firm of Babb, Cook & Willard, where he met McKenzie.

In 1910 the firm of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin was organized and continued Eidlitz's successful relationship with the telephone company, gaining commissions for buildings throughout New York State. By 1912 the firm had completed approximately thirty new telephone buildings in New York City alone (in addition to alterations and expansions).⁹ The firm also designed the Brooklyn Edison Company Building and the Brooklyn Municipal Building, as well as private residences. McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin was active through 1925.

In 1919 Ralph Walker (1889-1973) joined the office of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin. Born in Waterbury, Connecticut, Walker began a two-year apprenticeship with the Providence, Rhode Island, architectural firm of Hilton & Jackson in 1907 and then studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1911 Walker studied in Montreal with Francis Swales (1878-1962) who had established architectural firms in London, Montreal, and Vancouver, British Columbia, and later moved his practice to New York. In 1913 Walker practiced with James Ritchie in Boston and three years later won the Rotch Traveling Scholarship. Walker served in the war with the Army Corps of Engineers, and worked as a designer in the offices of Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue and York & Sawyer.

Walker's first major project with McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin was the Barclay-Vesey Building. Near the completion of the building and following the death of McKenzie, Walker became a partner in the firm, whose name then became Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. The success of the Barclay-Vesey Building and subsequent commissions brought Walker recognition as one of the city's prominent designers of Art Deco skyscrapers. Walker was a prolific architect, working almost exclusively for corporate clients, and especially for AT&T, becoming a specialist in the design of that company's buildings. Among his subsequent commissions were the Western Union Building, the Irving Trust Company Building at 1 Wall Street (1929-31), and the Long Distance Building of AT&T at 32 Sixth Avenue (1930-32, a designated New York City Landmark). Walker also designed buildings for General Foods and IBM and several pavilions at the 1939 World's Fair.

Active in professional circles, Walker served as president of several architectural organizations. In 1957 the AIA gave Walker the title of "architect of the century." In 1958 Walker resigned from active participation in the firm, then known as Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines, but continued his association with the firm in the capacity of a consultant. His firm continued in various forms and is today known as Haines, Lundberg & Waehler.

The Communications Buildings of Voorhees,
Gmelin & Walker¹⁰

The Western Union Building was the third of several similar communications buildings by Ralph Walker and the firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker built during the late 1920s in the New York and New Jersey area. These buildings, designed in a six-year period, are similar enough to be considered examples of a "house style"; each is a variation on a theme established by Walker's well-defined design theory. The Western Union Building followed the New York Telephone Company's Barclay-Vesey Building (1923-27) and the New Jersey Bell Headquarters Building, 540 Broad Street, Newark (1928-29), and was nearly contemporary with the telephone buildings in Syracuse and Rochester. Subsequent communications buildings in this series include the Long Distance Building of AT&T at 32 Sixth Avenue (1930-32); 435 West 50th Street, Manhattan (1929-30); 206 West 18th Street, Manhattan (1929-31); the Long Island Headquarters Building, 101 Willoughby Street, Brooklyn (1929-31); and the exchange building in Hempstead, Long Island (1930).¹¹ The Western Union Building, the only one of the group not designed for an affiliate of AT&T, is, nevertheless, exemplary of a similar aesthetic and differs from the telephone company buildings primarily in the omission of an iconographic ornamental program. These communications buildings are hybrid buildings, housing both equipment and offices. This dual use called for large, undivided floor areas for equipment and operators that could be placed around a central service core. The massing of the buildings, therefore, reflects the aesthetics of the new setback form that had developed, in part, in response to the 1916 Building Zone Resolution, rather than a form governed by required light courts. Designed to be occupied by a single tenant and to fit that corporation's program, these structures were considered by the architect to demand a consistency and unity of architectural expression.¹² The image of the machine age was extended to the building as a whole; Walker wrote that the Barclay-Vesey Building was conceived of as a "machine which had certain definite functions to perform economically for the benefit of its occupants."¹³ The Western Union Building was described as a factory, "housing the machinery for

the production of the service which this company renders."¹⁴

Walker's designs for the exterior walls of the communications buildings reflect his response to the theoretical problem of how to express the steel-frame structure. The walls display a fairly balanced grid of wide piers and only slightly less accentuated spandrels, corresponding to the post and girder system of the structure and allowing for a nearly equal balance of window and wall which Walker considered the ideal for comfortable interior illumination. The walls of several of the later communications buildings are modeled, with areas of accentuated, massed piers combined with flatter wall surfaces to emphasize the verticality of the structure and, in some cases, create a cascading effect at the setbacks. This later approach, carried into the faceted walls of interior spaces, expresses Walker's concept of the wall as merely a membrane or curtain to enclose the steel-frame structure. He believed that the architect "makes the balance between the structure and the skin which is its covering, and the requirements of man. . . ."¹⁵

The use of brick for the communications buildings was a "natural selection," due to the wide variety of color and the possibilities of ornamental treatment, which seemed less rich and, therefore, more suitable to a building of this type than any other material.¹⁶ The firm used brick in a manner similar to that of the German Expressionist architects, such as Fritz Hoeger, who considered the brick as "architecture's precious stone."¹⁷ Ralph Walker was noted by the brick industry as a frequent user of brick for economic reasons and durability; he designed with brick in a manner that let the material stand on its own, providing much of the ornament which he felt should enrich a skyscraper and "repay repeated study," without attempting to imitate stone.¹⁸

The "house style" developed by Walker and the Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker firm in the late 1920s has characteristic features, which have come to be identified with the Art Deco style, that varied in prominence in the designs and evolved over time. In the early Barclay-Vesey and New Jersey Bell Telephone Buildings, many elements of the style appear -- complex massing with a vertical emphasis, aesthetic integration of the exterior and interior spaces, and faceted forms. The elaborate figural ornamental programs of these earlier

buildings are less in evidence in the later examples and the importance of stone ornament is superseded by a fuller realization of the ornamental qualities of brick. There is a steady trend toward an expressive design approach in these buildings; this aesthetic informed Walker's other work as well and is very much in evidence in the design of the Irving Trust Building (1 Wall Street, 1929-31), which differs from the communications buildings primarily in its stone cladding.

The Design of the Western Union Building¹⁹

With the design of the Western Union Building, described at the time of its construction as representing the modern American style of architecture, Walker moved beyond the model of the Barclay-Vesey Building, with its complex ornamental program, toward the expressionistic vocabulary of the later communications buildings. The building stands apart from the other buildings in the series in its exclusive use of brick for ornamentation of both the exterior of the building and the public interior spaces of the first story. The design of the Western Union Building is remarkably integrated -- the forms, the materials, and the ornament -- and demonstrates Walker's achievement of harmony and unity in skyscraper design.

The massing of the Western Union Building belies the dictates of the building's irregularly-shaped lot; apparently Walker was responding to Lewis Mumford's criticism of the "awry" shape of the Barclay-Vesey Building due to its filling the entire irregular site. Walker later wrote of the lasting effects of Mumford's comments and his "early appreciation that the shape of the lot did not necessarily control the form of the building" and stated that "a building could take its own form regardless of the land below."²⁰ He employed this idea in the form of the Western Union Building, and developed an inventive massing solution which departs considerably from the footprint of the lot. At the Hudson Street end of the block, three slabs, which rise sheerly to the first setbacks, meet the angled Hudson Street lot line behind a two-story screen -- a series of opening enframements -- that serves as a traditional base for the main facade. The massed piers of the screen ground the soaring corner piers

of the two northern slabs. The architect explained that the adoption of this unusual scheme was due to "the superior massing of rectangular forms and through the powerful verticals rising, without interruption, at the corners of each setback."²¹

With highly visible, vertically articulated facades on all four sides, the Western Union Building, "a huge red rock projecting out of the city,"²² is solid and cliff-like, suggesting an interest in the natural and irregular forms of palisades and cliffs as shapes to be replicated in building masses. Upon close inspection, the building is a complex and sculpted form, with greater irregularity at the Hudson Street end of the building; in contrast, the stepped massing of the West Broadway end of the building is relatively straightforward and symmetrical, with the setbacks extending along most of the long north and south facades. A low tower, which rises only slightly above a central slab, unites the mass of the building.²³ The brick exterior walls of the Western Union Building can be likened to curtains which part at the major openings at the street level. The contemporary critic Paul T. Frankl wrote of such "brick tapestries hung from the sky," "mosaics of colored stone or tinted brick" which emphasized the natural beauty of the material and were free from unnecessary detail.²⁴ Incorporated into the curtain-like treatment of the brick exterior walls of the Western Union Building are elements which emphasize the complex massing of the building, a graded color scheme, distinctive curtain-framed proscenium-like openings, and patterned and sculptural brickwork at the base and parapets. These aspects of the design appear to be particularly influenced by the brick designs of the German and Dutch Expressionists in which the ornament is ingrained -- the brick itself introduces decoration -- and the exuberant use of brick creates variety in color and textural richness.²⁵

The expressive articulation of the brick wall of the upper facade of the building gives a vertical emphasis to the building's large bulk. The complex massing of the building as a whole is echoed in the use of highly modeled piers at street level and buttresses at the upper setbacks which have the forms of setback skyscrapers. The patterns of alternating wide and narrow piers on the Hudson Street facade and flat and modeled piers on the other facades establish a rhythm and provide richness in the design. The long south and

north facades are relieved by paired bays with no fenestration which front stairwells. These strong vertical elements extend through several upper levels and as projections above the setbacks, visually blending one level into the next. The original design of the parapet walls of the setbacks -- articulated with vertical patterns, faceted forms, and irregular edges -- also led the eye upward.²⁶

Walker explained that the client's desire for individuality in the Western Union Building prompted the graded color scheme of brick; the building was among the first buildings in which brick was used in this manner.²⁷ The shaded brick, from dark at the base to light at the top, was much discussed in the architectural and general press, and was described as "a pleasing exaggeration of the natural play of light upon the upper portions of the building."²⁸ The graded scheme was developed through the use of an extended palette of "tapestry brick," related shades of brick produced in a kiln-run due to the natural variation in clays and kiln temperatures. This concept and the term "tapestry brick," widely used in the 1920s, had been popularized by Louis Sullivan who recognized that the eye sees the close range of colors as harmonized, enriched tones.²⁹ Nineteen shades of brick create the graded color scheme of the Western Union Building; this effect, which has been obscured by soiling and repointing, was variously described at the time of construction as being in a number of ranges of shades -- from reddish brown to light salmon and in bright sunlight reminiscent of the Indian pueblo, and from deep red to light orange, as well as from deep rose red at the base, to rose pink at midsection, to a light delicate yellowish pink at the top -- attesting to the fact that the rich tones appeared differently under changing conditions. Two or three shades were used at the patterned areas of the building, the darker shades adding life to the lighter tone of the general field at the top, and the lighter shades serving the same purpose in the lower stories.³⁰

The brick curtain walls of the upper facades part near the street level as a series of large, proscenium-like openings, where the "curtain" appears to be drawn back in a corbelled arched form. These openings, perhaps prompted by Walker's interest in the set designs of Joseph Urban and in the theatrical lighting, draped openings, and enveloping interiors of theaters, are

remarkably similar to that of a drawn stage or proscenium curtain. Faceted, fan-like brick forms above these openings suggest a pleated valence.³¹ This shouldered arched shape with a serrated curve, in a number of variations, is used repeatedly on the exterior of the building, as well as for openings in the first floor interior, and is the predominant design motif of the building. The void described by the arch has the form of a set-back skyscraper, a design motif frequently found in the detailing of Art Deco skyscrapers.

All ornament on the exterior of the building, except for the bronze window and door frames and friezes, is executed in brick.³² "I believe in ornamentation, especially when it enhances individuality, but there must above everything else be unity and harmony" asserted Walker in 1930.³³ He favored the use of brick to produce ornament over terra cotta, which could produce an effect "like frosting on a plum pudding,"³⁴ and stone, which could change in appearance in a relatively short time, although he continued to use the latter in limited amounts. The brick ornamentation on the Western Union Building is concentrated around the street-level openings of the building -- below basketwork bands above the second-story windows at the upper edge of the implied base -- and at the setback parapets. The patterned spandrels and parapet walls (most now removed) of the setbacks "gave a play of light and shade when seen from the street, and [would] eventually serve to make more pleasant the idle moments of clerks in adjoining high buildings"³⁵ and created an irregular horizontal line; these designs were more robust and irregular in shape at the upper two setbacks. The carefully-detailed articulation of the upper areas of the building culminated in the faceted form of the upper walls and parapet of the tower.

The design of the Western Union Building first floor interior, unexpectedly executed in the same brick of the exterior, illustrates the extent of Walker's emphasis on unity and harmony in design. In addition to the materials, other elements of the exterior design appear on the interior, including the expressionistic brick patterning of chevrons and low-relief forms, the shouldered arch form of the exterior openings which is repeated as interior doorways, the faceted bronze trim, and the incorporation of the set-back skyscraper form in the design of doors and the mail box.

Description

The Western Union Building is a twenty-four-story building of steel-frame construction clad in brick, occupying the entire block bounded by West Broadway and Hudson, Thomas, and Worth Streets. The building, with four designed facades, has its principal facade and entrance on Hudson Street where a two-story screen adheres to the angled lot line. The building is irregularly massed, with a three-story tower rising above a central slab that dominates the east-west axis of the building. Above a polished rose Texas granite three-course base, the ironspot face brick is graded from a deep red at the base to a lighter shade at the top, and is enriched with patterned brickwork at the lower stories and, originally, at the parapet walls of the numerous setbacks; all copings are cast stone. The windows in the upper stories have four-over-four double-hung steel sash with wireglass, all set in single window bays.³⁶ Some of the window sash has been replaced with grilles.

The two-story screen at the Hudson Street facade demarcates a triangular space into which the three staggered volumes of the main building project to meet the screen. The main entrance, centered in the screen, is slightly recessed and framed by massed piers with stepped terminations which form the corbelled sides of the arched opening; above the large window at the mezzanine level the "pleated" brick wall is expressed with faceted forms. Bronze friezes with faceted patterns span the lintels of the entrance doors and the window above where gold-tone letters spelling "Western Union" are mounted on the bronze diamond-shaped muntins. The doors have a rectangular glazed area with a pointed-arch top outlined in bronze.

The other openings in the screen along Hudson Street are similarly framed and have storefront infill -- a bulkhead with a vertical pattern and side windows and transoms surrounding a central show window or door -- below a mezzanine-level window with dominant vertical muntins.³⁷ Bronze friezes enrich these openings as well. At the northwest corner of the screen a narrow entrance is enframed by a small version of the shouldered arch form, above which is a narrow, vertical panel of patterned brickwork. At the south bay of the Hudson Street facade, a small door is set into the vertical window bay of

the slab; replacement brick steps provide access to paired doors protected by a flat, projecting metal awning.³⁸

Behind the screen, the northern slab of the Hudson street facade rises fifteen stories; the wide corner piers, which fall away at the setback at the thirteenth story, are incorporated into the enframement of the two northern bays of the low screen. The center slab of the facade rises unbroken twenty-one stories from its slightly setback position behind the Hudson Street screen. The narrow slab at the southern end of the facade is modeled with a bay set back from the southern facade. The focal point of the upper portion of this facade is the crowning story of the central mass where the wide piers evolve into angled buttresses which frame faceted and patterned spandrels and parapet walls. Only in this area do such original parapet designs remain intact.

Behind this setback termination rises the crowning three-story tower which unites the two ends of the building. Prominent corner piers are enriched with complex angled buttresses. Pairs of double-height windows with stepped upper portions are framed by slim, angled buttresses. On the flat roof, adjacent to the tank enclosure, are towers with communications equipment.

The West Broadway facade of the building rises to a height of thirteen stories at the first setback and additional setbacks occur at the fifteenth, nineteenth, and twenty-second stories; at most of these setbacks the central section rises an additional story as a dormer projection. The walls are formed of alternating piers -- flat and modeled -- of equal width. At the base, the large openings are similar to those in the Hudson Street screen and are filled with the same bronze-enriched storefront and mezzanine window infill. At the main entrance bay, and most of the additional bays, the flat piers of the upper facade rise from corbelled elements at the mezzanine window lintels. At two of the bays, the flat piers rise from the lintel of the storefront window, and are flanked by patterned spandrels with a chevron pattern and double-hung windows at the mezzanine level.

The long side facades on Thomas and Worth Street are nearly identical. The facades rise to the first setback at the thirteenth story, above which the massing incorporates several shallow setbacks and dormer projections at the Hudson Street ends of the facades. The rhythm of the modeled and

flat piers is interrupted by wider, massed piers which visually support the corner piers of the tower. Wide vertical bands of two windowless bays on each facade, fronting stairwells, rise through several setback levels near the Hudson Street end of the building; modeled brickwork, with chevron patterns at the upper levels, reinforces the verticality of this feature. The original patterning of the parapet walls between the pier terminations has been replaced by a simple pattern of vertical scoring. At the central portions of the third-story floor level, the openings are filled with original copper louvers in a chevron pattern.

At the center portion of the base of the Worth Street facade is the exterior wall of the former auditorium, with tall triple-hung windows topped by patterned spandrels at the second-floor level.³⁹ Pairs of bays flanking these windows are essentially solid, with minor door and window openings. At the eastern and western ends of this facade are large openings like those in the West Broadway facade with the standard bronze-trimmed storefront infill. A narrow entrance at the western end is similar to the small entrance in the Hudson Street screen.

At the lower portion of the Thomas Street facade piers frame narrow fixed casement-like windows with transoms that originally lit the cafeteria area; decorative spandrels with chevron patterning appear at the mezzanine and second floor levels. At the center of this facade, four bays have window openings now filled with louvers. Near the eastern end of the facade are two loading bays set in openings like those of the West Broadway facade where the piers are flanked by windows at the mezzanine level; the lintels of the first-story openings are edged with a bronze frieze with a chevron pattern. At the eastern end of the facade are two openings like those of the West Broadway facade, filled with the standard bronze-trimmed storefront infill.

Subsequent History

The Western Union Telegraph Company sold the building in 1947 but continued to occupy it under a twenty-five year lease-back arrangement. In 1973 the headquarters staff moved to a new facility in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, while most of the operations remained in the building at 60 Hudson Street; after a second lease was sold in 1983, Western Union gradually vacated the building. One of the significant qualities of the building is its dual function as office space and a communications center. As technology in the field of communications has progressed, equipment has been added to the roof and regularly upgraded, while respecting the building's original design. This has enabled the building to retain its significance to the communications industry and serve as a center for communications companies. Currently, several such firms have space in the building, taking advantage of the clear sight-line to mid-Manhattan and New Jersey for microwave and other transmissions, the fiber-optic connection point in the building, and the ability to interconnect with each other's equipment. It is anticipated that rooftop equipment will continue to be upgraded on a regular basis.

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NOTES

1. The building's owners and the LPC have discussed the establishment of guidelines, after designation, for the future insertion of grilles into window openings on the Thomas Street and Worth Street facades, based on ten established types. With this matter resolved, the owner has no objection to designation.
2. This section is based on information in Garnet; *NYT*, including Aug. 12, 1930, Apr. 5, 1931, Mar. 14, 1953, and Carlton's obituary; Silver; and *A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City*.
3. See Weisman and Balmori for a fuller discussion of Post's Western Union Building.
4. Western Union owned shares in the 195 Broadway Corporation which built the first portion of the new building; it sold these shares when it moved to the Hudson Street building. *NYT*, Aug. 12, 1930, p. 37; Western Union Telegraph Company, *Annual Report*, 1930.
5. This section is based on "Western Union Telegraph Company Moves Into Its Magnificent New York Skyscraper Headquarters, The Biggest Telegraph Building in the World"; "Western Union Company's Army of Wire Experts Makes Greatest 'Cut Over' in Telegraph History at New Skyscraper Terminal in New York City"; Western Union Telegraph Company, *Dots and Dashes*; *NYT*; *Real Estate Record & Guide*; Glassman; Holton; and "Inspection of The Western Union Building."
6. According to the New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan docket book, the building was constructed under New Building Permit 278-1928.
7. Four additional floors were available as needed. These may have been initially rented; some accounts say that the entire building was occupied by Western Union.
8. This section is based on LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report*. See that document for more on the early partners and work of the firm, as well as sources, which include the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*.
9. Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines, 39-45.
10. This section is based on Robinson and Bletter; Stern; *Telephone Buildings Since 1885*; and LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report*, and *Long Distance Building of the AT&T Designation Report*.
11. The 204 Second Avenue Telephone Building (enlarged 1929-30) also has characteristics of the communications buildings.
12. Albright, "New Jersey Bell Telephone Building," 485. Edgar Albright joined the firm in 1929 and was described by Lovewell in 1931 as a design assistant to Walker. In his articles about the Western Union and New Jersey Bell Buildings it is assumed that he conveyed Walker's views about the designs.
13. Walker, "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building," 389, 397, also quoted in Stern.
14. Albright, "Sketches," 1.
15. Walker, "Architecture of Today," 462. Shapley, writing about the Irving Trust Building, asserted that Walker treated the designing of walls at will, with regard only for appearance.
16. Albright, "Sketches," 1.

17. Pehnt, 27.
18. Albright, "Sketches," 9; Walker, "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building," 398; and "New York Architects and Clay Products," 773.
19. This section is based on Stern; Robinson and Bletter; Albright "Sketches"; and contemporary descriptions of the building in other sources in the bibliography.
20. Walker's introduction in *Ralph Walker -- Architect*, 29, to a reprint of Mumford's article, which originally appeared in *The New Republic*, July 6, 1927. Walker also noted that he had made such a study for the Barclay-Vesey Building, but passed over it, the time not being ripe.
21. Albright, "Sketches," 1.
22. WPA, *New York City Guide*, 79.
23. The set of original drawings and plans for the building includes isometric studies of the envelope of the building allowed by the 1916 Building Zone Resolution and the dormer allowances of the various facades. The southwest corners of the two southern slabs penetrate the plane of the envelope as it rises from the angled Hudson Street lot line and are, technically, dormers. Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, original plans and drawings.
24. Frankl, 55, also quoted in Robinson and Bletter.
25. This influence may be due to Gmelin's background and interest in Northern European design, as well as the general interest in German architecture in the mid-1920s. See Robinson and Bletter; Bletter makes this point and includes a list of books on German architecture and stage design in the firm's library in Note 51, p. 77.
26. The designs of these parapets can be seen in photographs in Robinson and Bletter, No. 27, and Stern, 570.
27. "New York Architects and Clay Products." This group includes the Master Building (1928-29, Helmle, Corbett & Harrison with Sugarman & Berger, associated architects) in New York City, the Public Service Building in Boston (1928-29, Harold Field Kellogg), and the building at 201 North Wells Street in Chicago (1930, Thielbar & Fugard). Kellogg's description of the design process undertaken for the Public Service Building suggests that the building was inspired by the natural phenomenon of colors lightening at a distance. He noted the importance of studying the effect shadows would have on the color changes, as well as of using colored models to perfect the color grading. The brick for this building was mixed for each story at the factory and delivered to the mason on the scaffold ready to use; colored mortar was also mixed for each story to match the brick tones. It is assumed that similar measures were taken in the design and construction of the Western Union Building; the drawings of elevation details were coded with brick color numbers, suggesting that in the patterned areas the mason worked with shop drawings.
28. Albright, "Sketches," 1.
29. According to Weingarden, Sullivan first used blended shades of brick in the Felsenthal Store in 1905. Thomas Tallmadge, in writing about Sullivan's work, coined the phrase "tapestry brick." Sullivan likened the use of tapestry brick to the work of an Impressionist painter; he used tapestry brick in the design of the small midwestern banks in the 1910s and 1920s. Fiske & Co., Inc. adopted the term "Tapestry Brick" as a trademark name for a rough textured brick line in blended ranges. (see the firm's brochures, *Tapestry Brickwork*, 1909-1913). During the 1920s blended shades of brick were available from many brickmakers,

as standard mixtures of mingled colors or wide ranges of tones, usually marketed with names evoking a range of colors in nature, such as "forest blend." The brick supplier for the Western Union Building remains undetermined.

30. Albright, "Sketches," 1; Cuthbert noted that the brick of the Western Union Building would include the "so-called peacock blacks, although very dark in color are not actually black but show[ing] more or less iridescent shades of blue and purple," 252; Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, original elevation drawings of the building.
31. The term "fan-arch openings" appears on detail drawings of the building. The elevation drawings of the cafeteria on the first story indicate that this curtain image was planned to be extended to the interior of that space, and the above-window area is modeled as a curtain valence.
32. An undated drawing of the Hudson Street screen elevation indicates that there was consideration given to the use of polished granite for the entire screen; the fan arches are detailed on the convex edge with a piece of trim, probably a bronze strip, that suggests a star or sunburst form. Drawings for the screen in brick are dated in November and December, 1928; it would be interesting to know if the substitution was made for the sake of unity in materials or for economic reasons. Other unrealized designs were an exquisite ornate bronze grille for the large window above the entrance -- a hung spider web design with a myriad of curved diagonals -- and variations of this pattern developed for the grilles of windows above the two small entrances on Hudson and Worth Streets; the design of the existing grilles suggests that the substitution was made for economic reasons.
33. "New York Architects and Clay Products," 773.
34. Ibid.
35. Albright, "New Jersey Bell Telephone Building," 486.
36. These windows have been described as Campbell metal frame (steel) windows in a description of the building by W.H. Tapken, clipping file of Western Union, and in "Building Report for Travelers Life Insurance Co." in the files of the Building Manager. Other materials are noted in "The Western Union Building," *Architecture*, 77.
37. An image reproduced from *Telegraph and Telephone Age* in the LPC Research Files indicates the original configuration of the opening to the Newsstand, which was the entrance to the Western Union commercial telegraph office in the building.
38. The property line is marked by a change in concrete paving and bronze socket plates and two small plaques, remnants of the original scheme which included a bronze strip and iron posts which edged the lot line.
39. The auditorium windows are double glazed and the interior sash is visible on the exterior. The small grille between the mezzanine and second-story levels ventilates the projection room of the auditorium.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 Western Union 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 Western Union Building (1928-30), designed by Ralph Walker, one of New York's foremost architects of the period, is a recognized achievement in modernistic skyscraper design; that the building is characteristic of a group of communications buildings designed by Walker in the late 1920s, primarily for the telephone companies, in which he developed a distinctive design approach related to the contemporary Art Deco style; that the design of the Western Union Building was influenced by the work of the German and Dutch Expressionist architects, and drew upon Walker's well-defined design theory which emphasized harmony and unity; that the integrated aesthetic of form, material, and ornamentation incorporates such elements as patterned brickwork, dramatic entrances, faceted wall planes and trim, and complex and asymmetrical massing; that the innovative, cliff-like form of the Western Union Building departs from the shape of the site and includes a low screen that conforms to the Hudson Street lot line; that the exterior brick walls are carefully articulated in a textured, curtain-like manner, parting as proscenium-like openings at the ground story; that the building was among the first to have a graded brick color scheme, from dark at the bottom to light at the upper stories, which was "a pleasing exaggeration of the natural play of light"; that commissioned by Newcomb Carlton, president of the Western Union Telegraph Company, the new headquarters building allowed the consolidation of all operations in one location, "the largest telegraph building in the world"; that the modernistic design helped to reestablish a corporate identity for Western Union after its dominance by the American Telephone & Telegraph Company; and that the Western Union Building remains in use as a communications center, housing both equipment and offices.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21), 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 Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street, Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 144, Lot 40, as its Landmark Site.

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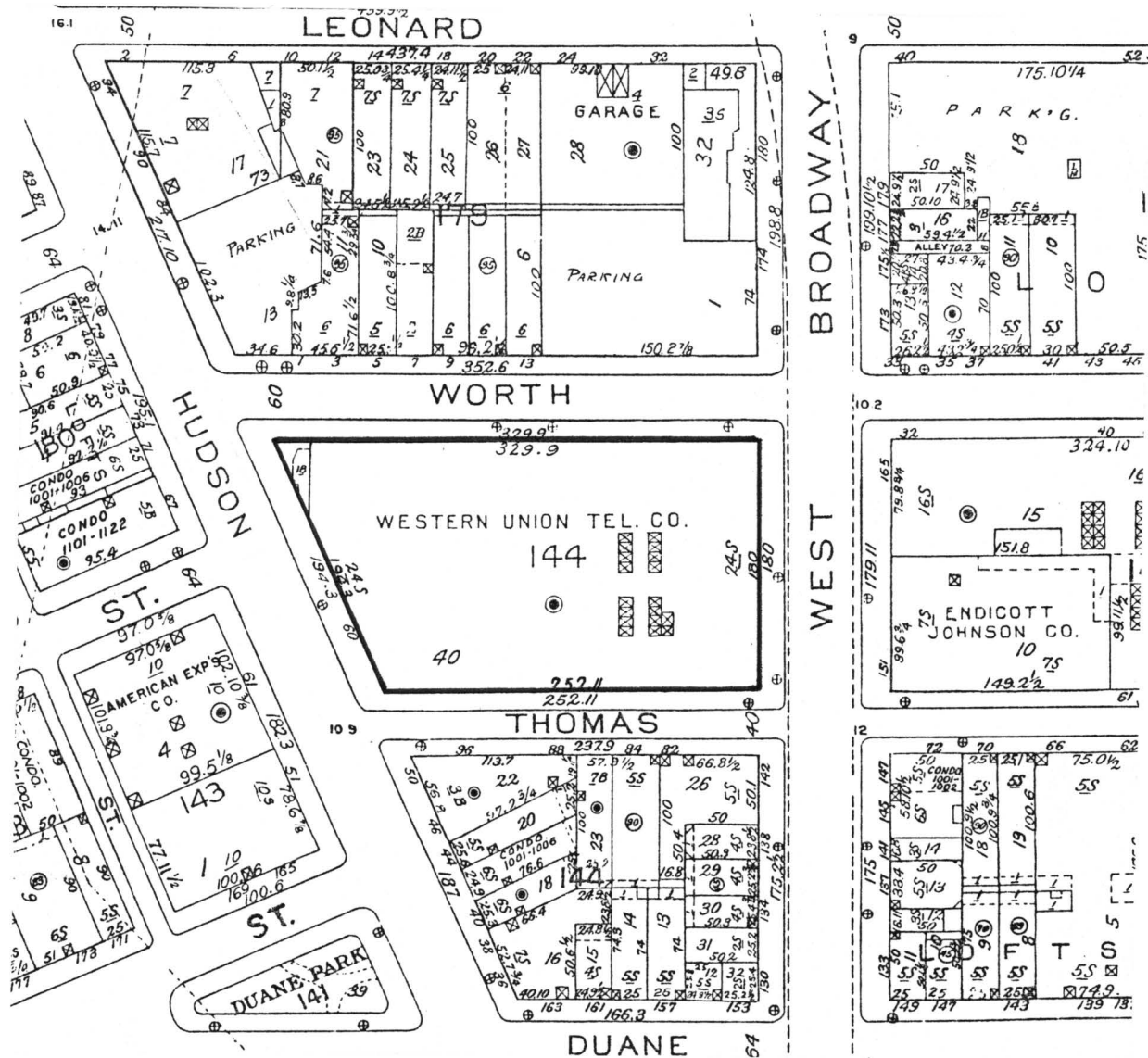
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Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
 Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
 Landmark Site: Tax Map Block 144, Lot 40

Graphic Source: Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1988-89 Ed.



Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Thomas Street and West Broadway Facades

Photo Credit: Carl Forster



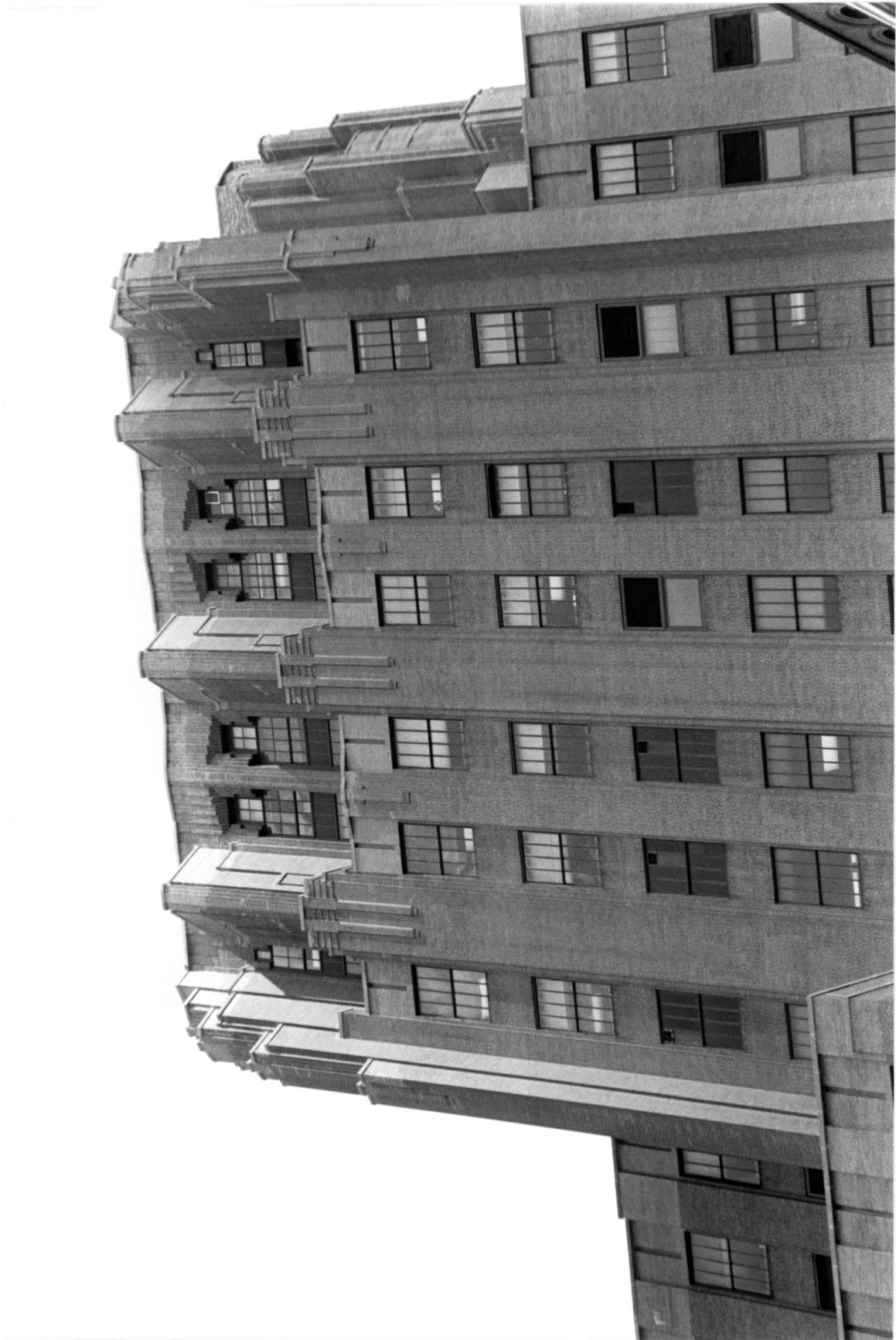
Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Hudson and Worth Street Facades

Photo Credit: Carl Forster



Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
West Broadway Facade

Photo Credit: Carl Forster



Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Parapet detail, Hudson Street facade.

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Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Main Entrance, Hudson Street Facade

Photo Credit: Carl Forster



Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Ground Story, West Broadway Facade

Photo Credit: Carl Forster