

THE WESTERN UNION BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR consisting of the Hudson Street entrance vestibule, the West Broadway entrance vestibule, the main corridor, the entrance hall, elevator lobbies, the telephone alcove, the auditorium lobby, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall, ceiling, and floor surfaces, doors, elevator doors, and attached decorative elements, 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 an Interior Landmark of the Western Union Building, first floor interior consisting of the Hudson Street entrance vestibule, the West Broadway entrance vestibule, the lobby, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall, ceiling, and floor surfaces, doors, elevator doors, and attached decorative elements, 60 Hudson Street, Manhattan, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 36). 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. 14). At that hearing, the owner's representative requested another continuance, and the hearing was continued to April 3, 1990 (Item No. 14). 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

Summary

The first floor interior of 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 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 interior was influenced by the work of German and Dutch Expressionist architects and drew upon Walker's well-defined design theory emphasizing harmony and unity. In the design of the interior, executed in the expressionistic style of the exterior of the building, Walker used materials and design motifs in an innovative manner to link the interior and exterior. The unusual all-brick interior space is a long corridor between two entrance vestibules with transverse openings for elevator lobbies, a lobby for the former auditorium, and a public telephone alcove. The seamless extension of the patterned brick walls into the Guastavino tile barrel-vaulted ceiling creates interior spaces that are striking and enveloping. These surfaces are angled and faceted, continuing the metaphor of the hung curtain which is prominent in the design of the exterior walls. The dramatic indirect lighting and the unusual corbelled arched doorways further the expressionistic aspects of the design, complemented with bronze fittings, light fixtures, and doors. Commissioned by Newcomb Carlton, president of the Western Union Telegraph Company, the new headquarters building, "the largest telegraph building in the world," allowed the consolidation of all operations in one location and its modernistic design helped to reestablish a corporate identity for Western Union after its dominance by the American Telephone & Telegraph Company.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

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, which was among the first conspicuously tall buildings to rise above the general level of the skyline in New York City.

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 Lisenard 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, 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 Lisenard Building.³

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"⁴

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.⁵

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.⁶ 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 running from Hudson Street to West Broadway, were located an auditorium for lectures to company personnel, a cafeteria for employees, and several retail spaces.

Ralph Walker and Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker⁷

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 (as well as alterations and expansions).⁸ 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 & Walker⁹

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).¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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. The use of brick for the communications buildings was a "natural selection" due to the wide variety of color and possibilities of ornamental treatment, which seemed less rich, and therefore, more suitable to a building of this type than any other material.¹² 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 Building First Floor Interior

The role of the lobby in a modernistic commercial and office building, as expressed by the contemporary critic R.W. Sexton, was as a space to welcome the visitor in a "cordial, yet serious, manner" and as a "vehicle to express the strength, prosperity, and refinement of the building owner."¹³ The goal in lobby design, he asserted, was to achieve this tone, not through "ostentatious richness or gaudiness," but with the quality of materials employed -- the virtually standard marble walls, tile floors, painted ceilings, and bronze ornament and doors. Many of the lobbies of Art Deco style skyscrapers incorporate updated versions of the traditional lobby elements and materials; the modernity of these designs appears primarily in the stylized ornament, the placement of which is governed by classical forms and traditions. Among the few unconventional lobbies of the period is that of the Western Union Building, a modernistic design executed in brick with few references to the traditional formulaic scheme.

In the 1920s American architects explored, in concert with the work of their European contemporaries, the concept that "architecture and decorative art must go hand in hand," and that "the

outside and inside must be one piece and one spirit."¹⁴ Ralph Walker adopted this approach for the Barclay-Vesey Building where the first floor interior is an integral component of his overall design. This approach was much praised and Walker continued to explore ways of linking the interiors and exteriors of buildings. In his New Jersey Bell Building in Newark, the variegated sandstone of the exterior facade appears in the main vestibule as well. This continuity between interior and exterior design, which appears in varying degrees in the communications buildings (and most thoroughly in the Western Union Building), was seen by the contemporary architectural critic Lewis Mumford as a perpetuation of the work of H.H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright.¹⁵

The first floor interior of the Western Union Building is executed unexpectedly in the same brick as the exterior, rather than in the traditional marble and plaster. The continuation of the material of the exterior to the interior, however, was consistent with Walker's design theories emphasizing unity and harmony. Other elements of the exterior design were extended to the interior as well: the expressionistic brick patterning of chevrons and low-relief forms, the faceted bronze trim, the shouldered arched form of the exterior openings repeated as interior doorways, and the abstracted motif of the set-back skyscraper echoed in the doorway openings, mail box, and designs of interior doors. The angled walls suggest the gently rippled forms of hung curtains, a metaphor prominent in the design of the exterior walls.

The use of brick for a major public interior space was unusual in the late 1920s; Western Union Company literature described the "striking study in colored brick" as the "only all-brick corridor in any office building in America."¹⁶ Walker was noted by the brick industry as a frequent user of brick, and treated 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 brick designs in which the ornament is ingrained -- the brick itself introduces decoration -- and the exuberant use of brick creates variety in color and textural richness seem to have influenced Walker. He designed with brick in a manner that let the material stand on its own and provide much of the ornament which he felt should enrich a

skyscraper and "repay repeated interest and study," without attempting to imitate stone.¹⁸ Walker's use of larger ceramic tiles in the interiors of the Long Distance and 435 West 50th Street Buildings are a further exploration of a theme initiated with the Western Union Building interior.

Although the use of brick on the interior was certainly a novel treatment for an office building lobby, there were a few prototypes. Louis Sullivan, who popularized "tapestry brick" -- brick in richly blended shades, such as that used on the Western Union Building -- used brick on the interiors of several of his small banks in the Midwest; in Sullivan's designs the brick provided the earth tones in overall polychromatic schemes conceived to bring the natural landscape indoors. A more contemporaneous design source was the I.G. Farben Dyeworks at Hoechst, designed by Peter Behrens and constructed between 1920-24. The dramatic, soaring space of the main hall was enclosed by angled and serrated brick walls, painted in a graded color scheme. Brick also appeared in several notable modernistic church interiors in the early 1920s. Barry Byrne's St. Thomas the Apostle in Chicago (1924) has a brick interior as does the expressionistic Grundtvig Church in Copenhagen (P.V. Jensen Klint, 1913, 1921-26).¹⁹

The design of the brick lobby also reflects Walker's characteristic modeling of walls and ceilings as a means to enclose space. This approach corresponds to his treatment of the wall of the steel-frame structure as a membrane or curtain that could be either planar or modeled with faceted forms or massed piers. Walls are "run in varying planes,"²⁰ and the division between wall and ceiling is blurred by faceted or curved forms at the coving. Such forms appear, to a limited extent, in the lobby of the Barclay-Vesey Building²¹ and, in a more developed degree, in the first floor interiors of the New Jersey Bell and Long Island Headquarters communications buildings. The firm described this design approach as "an attempt to gain a feeling of spaciousness and warmth of color by the use of lines and varying planes which continue from wall to wall across the ceiling and avoid the creation of the very definite line between the two which so often results in a feeling of oppressiveness."²² This integration of line, plane, and color, along with the richness of the materials, were intended to produce an overall effect that

eliminated the typical elements of the traditional treatment of interiors.

The materials of the Western Union Building interior are coordinated to create a rich, unified appearance and further the enveloping nature of the space. The deep red marble base of the walls is faceted and scored so that the wall patterns begin at floor level. The faceted planes and piers of the walls continue across the ceiling, the brick indistinguishable from the Guastavino tile of the ceiling.²³ The terrazzo floor is patterned in several shades of red to relate to the angled wall forms. The ceiling and areas of patterned brickwork are dramatically and indirectly lit by wall sconces and floor lamps. This lighting technique, popularized with the modernistic movement, adds drama to the setting and reflects Walker's interest in theater and set design, as well as the influence of German Expressionism. The unusual corbelled arched doorways, enriched with bronze, become unexpected focal points in the setting which is also enriched with Art Deco bronze furnishings.

Description

The interior public space of the first floor of the Western Union Building consists of a vaulted, twenty-five-foot wide corridor extending from the Hudson Street vestibule to the West Broadway vestibule. The description of the corridor as an arcade "entirely in polychrome brick and tile, including the floor, sidewalks [sic], and vaulted ceilings,"²⁴ notes its street-like function of traversing the building which occupies an entire block. Opening opposite of each other off the main corridor are two elevator lobbies. An alcove with public telephones opens off to the south and a lobby for the former auditorium (not included in this designation) opens off to the north. The corridor widens near the Hudson Street end of the building into an entrance hall which originally provided access to the auditorium and the former cafeteria (on the south side of the corridor, not included in this designation). There are two interior storefront entrances to the corner retail spaces (not included in this designation) at each end of the corridor. Several additional doors provide access to stairwells and service areas. The original furnishings of the public spaces include a brick reception desk, and bronze letter box, directory boards, clock, light fixtures, and signs.

The common, or American, bond of the brick wall surfaces is enlivened with header and chevron patterns above the marble base. A structural quality is created in the space through the use of brick patterning in low relief for piers and ribs of the vaulted ceiling. Within the wall and ceiling bays the surfaces are angled and faceted; variants of this scheme and changes in ceiling height are used to define areas. Door openings are enhanced with surrounds executed in low relief. The upper area of the wall is recessed slightly; basketwork patterns, in lieu of a more traditional frieze, edge the angled planes of the ceiling. The patterning and modeling is accomplished through the use of standard bricks, a great many of which have ends cut at an angle to create the chevrons and to form the faceted corners. The designs for the various doors are related by the incorporation of the abstracted form of a set-back skyscraper. The void of the doorways to the alcoves off the main corridor, similar in shape to the exterior openings of the building, suggests the shape of a building such as the Western Union Building. Several doors which open off the corridor and entrance hall to stair halls, service areas, and the auditorium are bronze, enriched with the inscribed pattern of a skyscraper. A similar, yet simplified, pattern is used on the elevator doors. Another skyscraper shape, with setbacks and an angled top, appears in the glazed bronze door at the retail area on the south side of the West Broadway end of the corridor (the only survivor of the original design). A simplification of this shape appears as the glazed area of the revolving doors.

Vestibules. Rather large entrance vestibules are separated from the main corridor of the first floor by sets of revolving doors. The narrow, deep Hudson Street vestibule fills the space behind the screen portion of the building which adheres to the Hudson Street lot line, while the West Broadway vestibule is nearly square in plan. The faceted brick ceilings of the vestibules are lit by concealed lights above the revolving doors. The areas above these doors are filled with windows with diagonal bronze muntins holding opaque glass. Faceted bronze friezes edge the lintels of both the banks of single-leaf doors leading to the exterior and the pair of revolving doors leading from each vestibule to the corridor.

In the Hudson Street vestibule, corbelled arched doorways in each side wall lead to narrow

vaulted hallways that bypass the revolving doors. A glazed bronze door in the south hallway and a solid bronze door with a scored design in the north hallway provide access to flanking spaces. At the West Broadway vestibule recessed light fixtures in the outer walls light the shorter passages flanking the revolving doors. There are glazed bronze doors at the corridor end of the passageways of both vestibules.

Main Corridor. The end walls of the corridor are dominated by the large windows of the vestibules and are framed by projecting piers which support ribs of the vaulted ceiling. At both ends of the corridor are located the glazed tripartite storefronts and flanking radiator grilles which are united by patterned surrounds.²⁵ The eastern portion of the corridor is quite long; it opens onto the transverse elevator lobbies, telephone alcove, and auditorium lobby.

The fittings of the corridor are executed in bronze and brick. Perpendicular bronze signs hung from rods indicate the telephone lobby, the elevator lobbies, and the various retail operations. Several pairs of bronze floor lamps -- red-tinted poles with cylindrical bronze shades which direct the light upward -- flank the transverse lobby entrances and the revolving doors to the vestibules. These supplement the bronze wall sconces -- ribbed quarter cylinders -- which are placed about mid-height on the corridor walls; most of the light is directed upward but diffusers at the bottom (some of which still function) originally directed some light downward. The tripartite radiator grilles throughout the corridor, small lobbies, and vestibules have lozenge patterns.

Near the center of the corridor, on the north side, is a brick reception desk with patterned panels. On the desk are two lamps with fluted shades which are similar to the floor lamps. On the wall above the desk is a perpendicular double-sided clock with black faces in an octagonal bronze frame. Opposite the desk, on the south wall, is a pair of bronze framed directory boards lit from the top by bronze sconces. A bronze letter box is mounted along the north side of the corridor wall. As was typical of the time, it has a sculpted shape, faceted at the bottom, and with a shouldered form at the top; the crowning projection has the shape of a set-back skyscraper.

Entrance Hall. The entrance hall is a wider portion of the main corridor, near the Hudson

Street end of the building, which provides a larger, room-like space at the entrance to the former cafeteria (on the south side of the building) and near the former auditorium lobby. Side bays added to the corridor create a nave-like area, framed by engaged columns which, with the pair of freestanding octagonal columns, support the ribs of the nearly-flat barrel vault of the ceiling. The upper third of these engaged and freestanding columns are patterned and have dark brick accents. The side walls are brick-sheathed to the height above the doors, which are set in patterned surrounds. The upper walls are plaster, with patterned brickwork extending downward from the ceiling creating bays with arched heads. The plaster areas were planned to receive mural paintings; paired graphics, depicting communication devices, have been hung instead. Chandeliers -- each with glass rods held in a bronze framework surrounding a tall hexagonal diffuser -- hang from the center of each side bay; bronze wall sconces light the ceiling. Single doors in the east walls of the hall provide access to stairhalls. Paired doors provide access to the former auditorium on the north.²⁶

Elevator Lobbies. The two elevator lobbies extend transversely to the main corridor, one to the north and one to the south. Their doorways are framed with a corbelled arched form enriched with bronze reveals and soffits. The lobbies are treated as smaller versions of the main corridor. The upper walls are recessed slightly in a series of shallow corbelled steps, accented by the light from bronze wall sconces placed between the elevator doors. Above the elevator openings extend illuminated bronze-framed signs. The elevator door frames are bronze, as are the doors which have an incised pattern.

Telephone Alcove. The telephone alcove extends off the main corridor on the south side, just east of the elevator lobby. The smaller doorway is a variant of the corbelled arched shape with bronze trim. The brick on the upper walls of the alcove is laid in a vertical stretcher pattern; the small areas of exposed lower wall are sheathed in steel panels. The chevron pattern of the terrazzo floor is partially covered by the eastern bank of

steel telephone booths, which is identical to the western bank of booths.²⁷ A corbelled arched narrow doorway in the south end wall gives access to a narrow staircase leading to the mezzanine.

Auditorium Lobby. The auditorium lobby, a transverse hallway off of the north side of the main corridor near the center, is similar in size and design to the elevator lobbies. Flat, plain wall surfaces alternate with the patterned brick door and radiator grille surrounds. Two sets of paired bronze doors in the north end wall give access to the former auditorium. Bronze wall sconces above each door and grille light the ceiling. From the center of the ceiling hangs a chandelier identical to those in the entrance hall.

Subsequent History

The first floor interior of the Western Union Building is virtually unchanged from its original appearance. 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. The facility has continued to serve as a center for communications companies. Currently, several such companies 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.

*Report prepared by Betsy Bradley
Research Department*

*Report edited by Elisa Urbanelli
Research Department Editor*

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 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, and Mar. 14, 1953, and Carlton's obituary; Weisman; and *A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City*.
3. 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.
4. 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."
5. According to the New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan docket book, the building was constructed under New Building Permit 278-1928. It took Marc Eidlitz & Son two years to construct the steel-framed building because of its complex technical requirements.
6. Four additional floor were available as needed. These may have been initially rented; some accounts say that the entire building was occupied by Western Union.
7. 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*.
8. Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines, 39-45.
9. This section is based on Robinson and Bletter; Stern; *Telephone Buildings Since 1885*; LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report*, and *Long Distance Building of the AT&T Designation Report*.
10. The 204 Second Avenue Telephone Building (enlarged 1929-30) also has characteristics of the communications buildings.
11. 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.
12. Albright, "Sketches," 1.
13. Sexton, 11.
14. Frankl, 61.
15. Walker, *Ralph Walker -- Architect*, 30-31, reprint of Lewis Mumford, "The Barclay-Vesey Building," *New Republic* 51 (July 6, 1927), 176-77.

16. "Western Union Company's Army of Wire Experts Makes Greatest 'Cut-Over' in Telegraph History at New Skyscraper Terminal in New York City," 460; "Telegraph Capitol of America," 1.
17. Pehnt, 27.
18. Albright, "Sketches," 9; Walker, "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building," 398 and "New York Architects and Clay Products," 773.
19. See Weingarden for a discussion of Sullivan's use of tapestry brick in his designs for banks. Robinson and Bletter note the dramatic design of the interior of the Dyeworks at Hoechst, which was published in *American Architect* in 1925; a color photograph appears in Buddensieg. See Chappell and Van Zanten for a review of Byrne's use of brick.
20. "Western Union Building," *Architecture*, 81.
21. Robinson and Bletter note the faceted coving in the board room as being German Expressionist in origin; this feature was probably designed later than the lobby.
22. Albright, "New Jersey Bell," 486. This design approach was used in the auditoriums of the New Jersey Bell and Western Union Buildings as well.
23. R. Guastavino Company advertisement. Walker had used Guastavino tile in the arcade of the Barclay-Vesey Building.
24. "Inspection of the Western Union Building."
25. The storefront on the north side of the West Broadway end of the corridor has been removed. A sign and awning have been added to the storefront on the north side of the Hudson Street end of the corridor.
26. The revolving doors which provided access to the cafeteria have been removed and replacement bronze doors have been installed on the southern side of the revolving door housing.
27. The fact that the eastern portion of the floor design is covered and the indication on original plans that the eastern bank of telephones were placed in a recessed area suggest that these booths have been repositioned, leaving a narrower aisle.

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 First Floor Interior consisting of the Hudson Street entrance vestibule, the West Broadway entrance vestibule, the main corridor, the entrance hall, elevator lobbies, the telephone alcove, the auditorium lobby, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall, ceiling, and floor surfaces, doors, elevator doors, and attached decorative elements, 60 Hudson Street, Manhattan, 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 is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public, and to which the public is customarily invited.

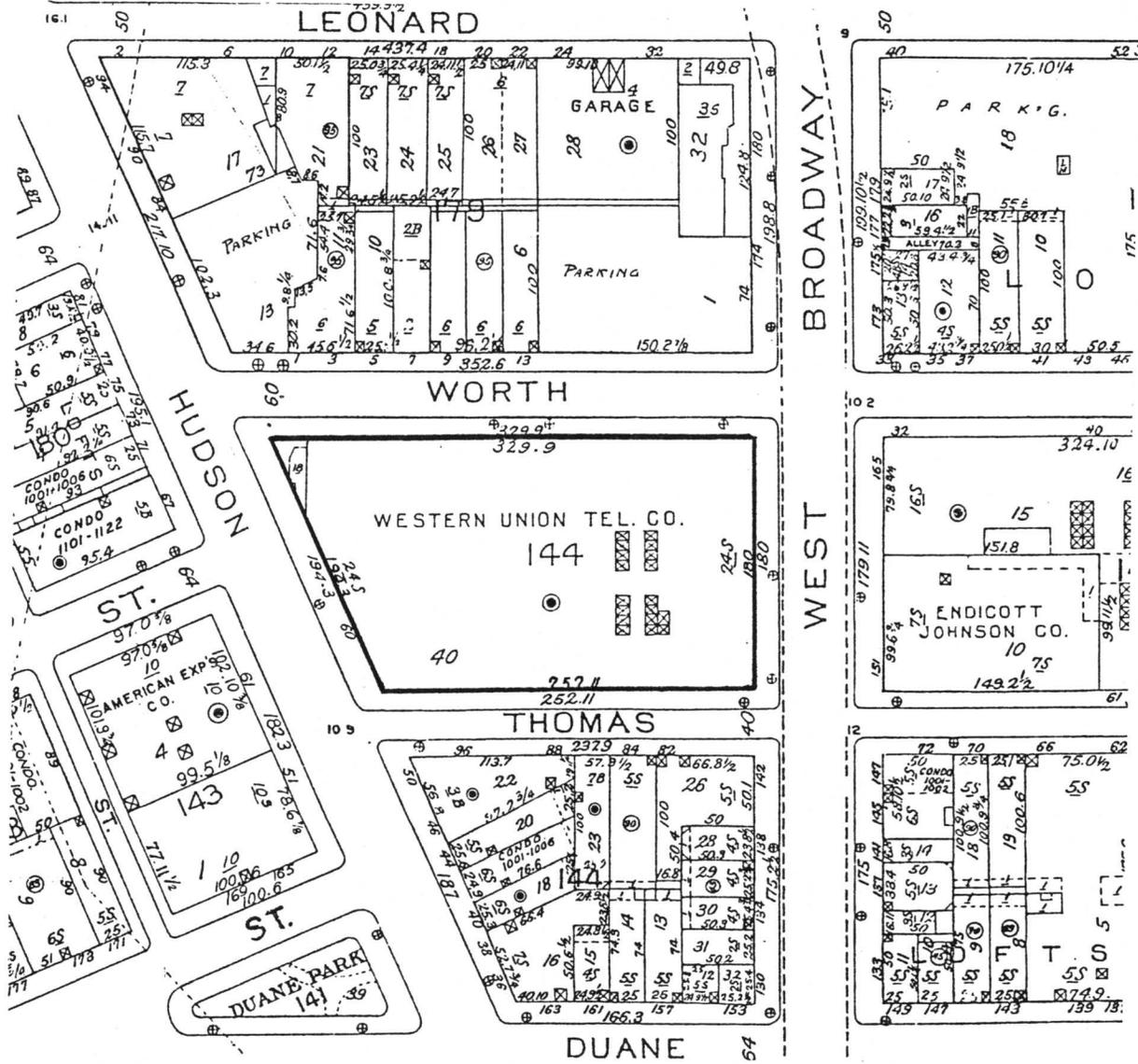
The commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Western Union Building First Floor Interior (1928-30), designed by Ralph Walker, one of New York's foremost architects of the period, is a recognized achievement in modernistic design; that the building is characteristic of a group 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 interior was influenced by the work of German and Dutch Expressionist architects and drew upon Walker's well-defined design theory emphasizing harmony and unity; that in the design of the first floor interior, executed in the expressionistic style of the exterior of the building, Walker used materials and design motifs in an innovative manner to link the interior and exterior; that the design of the interior space is exceptional in its extensive use of brick with ingrained, modeled ornament of various colors and patterns; that the seamless extension of the patterned brick walls into the Guastavino tile barrel-vaulted ceiling creates interior spaces that are striking and enveloping; that these surfaces are angled and faceted, continuing the metaphor of the hung curtain which is prominent in the design of the exterior walls; that the dramatic indirect lighting and the unusual corbelled arched doorways further the expressionistic aspects of the design, complemented with bronze fittings, light fixtures, and doors; that commissioned by Newcomb Carlton, president of the Western Union Telegraph Company, the new headquarters building, "the largest telegraph building in the world," allowed the consolidation of all operations in one location; and that its modernistic design helped to reestablish a corporate identity for Western Union after its dominance by the American Telephone & Telegraph Company.

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 an Interior Landmark the Western Union Building, First Floor Interior consisting of the Hudson Street entrance vestibule, the West Broadway entrance vestibule, the main corridor, the entrance hall, elevator lobbies, the telephone alcove, the auditorium lobby, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall, ceiling, and floor surfaces, doors, elevator doors, and attached decorative elements, 60 Hudson Street, Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 144, Lot 40, as its Landmark Site.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albright, Edgar. "Sketches Illustrating the Design Development of an Office Building, The Western Union Telegraph Building, Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, Architects." *The Architectural Record* 66 (July, 1929) 1-9.
- _____. "New Jersey Bell Telephone Building as an Example of Modern Building Design." Illuminating Engineering Society. *Transactions* 35 (May, 1930), 485-488.
- Bosserman, Joseph Norwood (compiler). *Ralph Walker Bibliography*. American Association of Architectural Bibliographers. pub. 17.
- Buddensieg, Tilmann, et al. *Peter Behrens: Umbautis Licht: Das Verwaltungsgebäude der Hoechst AG*. Frankfurt: Prestel, c.1990.
- [Carlton, Newcomb. Obituary]. *New York Times*, Mar. 14, 1953.
- Chappell, Sally Kitt, and Ann Van Zanten. *Barry Byrne, John Lloyd Wright, Architecture and Design*. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1982.
- Frankl, Paul T. *New Dimensions*. New York: Payson & Clarke, Ltd. 1928.
- Garnet, Robert W. *The Telephone Enterprise: The Evolution of the Bell System Horizontal Structure, 1876-1909*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985.
- Glassman, Don. "New Telegraph Office Ready for Use." Clipping file, Western Union Telegraph Company.
- A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City*. 1898. Rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1967.
- Holton, James L. "'Salmon Pink' Western Union Building Soon Ready." *New York Telegram*, Sept. 1928. Clipping file, Western Union Telegraph Company.
- "Inspection of The Western Union Building." Program. New York: Real Estate Board of New York, 1930.
- Koyl, George S., ed. *American Architects Directory*. New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1962.
- Landmarks Preservation Commission. *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report (LP-1745)*. Report prepared by Margaret Pickart, 1991. *Long Distance Building of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company Designation Report (LP-1747)*. Report prepared by David Breiner, 1991.
- Lovewell, C.E. "Designers of Clay Products." *Brick and Clay Record* 79 (July 14, 1931), 16-20.
- New York City. Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets. [Block 144, Lot 40].
- New York Times*, June 28, 1914, sec. I, p. 3; June 29, 1914 ("Western Union Moves to 24 Walker Street Without a Hitch"), p. 13; April 9, 1914 ("Western Union Ends Merger"), p. 13; April 16, 1914 ("Carlton Elected President of Western Union"), p. 13; Dec. 13, 1914, sec. VI, p. 4; Nov. 22, 1924 ("Western Union Buys a Big Plot") Western Union clipping file, n.p.; May 3, 1928 ("Western Union to Improve Whole Block") p. 48; Aug. 22, 1928 ("Skyscraper Begun by Western Union"), p. 32; Sept. 23, 1928 ("Excavation Work Started on Largest Telegraph Building in World"), sec. II, p. 19; Aug. 12, 1930 ("Western Union Quits Its 55-Year Home"), p. 37; Aug. 30, 1930 ("Western Union Starts Moving"), p. 17; Apr. 5, 1931 ("Big Strides Shown by Western Union"), sec. 33, p. 9; Mar. 12, 1948 ("Western Union Sells Office Building for \$12,500,000 and Leases It Back"), Western Union clipping file, n.p.
- Pehtnt, Wolfgang. *Expressionist Architecture*. New York: Praeger Publications, 1973.
- R. Guastavino Company advertisement. *American Architect* 138 (Sept., 1930), 113.

- Robinson, Cervin and Rosemarie Haag Bletter. *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Sexton, R.W. *American Commercial Buildings of Today*. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1928.
- Stern, Robert A.M., Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins. *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars*. New York: Rizzoli, 1987.
- "\$13,500,000 Western Union Building Under Way." *Real Estate Record & Guide* 122 (Oct. 20, 1928), 9.
- Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. Original Plans and drawings of the Western Union Building. Archives of Haines, Lundberg & Waehler.
- Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines. *Telephone Buildings Since 1885*. New York, 1961.
- Walker, Ralph T. "A New Architecture." *Telephone Review* (Sept., 1926), 323-325.
- _____. "Architecture of To-day, An American Architect's View." *Creative Art* 5 (July, 1929), 460-465.
- _____. "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building." *American Architect* 130 (Nov. 20, 1926), 387-399.
- _____. *Ralph Walker -- Architect*. New York: Henahan House, 1957.
- Weingarden, Lauren S. *Louis H. Sullivan: The Banks*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987.
- Weisman, Winston. "A New View of Skyscraper History." *The Rise of An American Architecture*. Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., ed. New York: Praeger, 1970, 115-60.
- "Western Union Building, New York City." *Architecture* 64 (Aug., 1931), 77-82.
- Western Union Company's Army of Wire Experts Makes Greatest 'Cut Over' in Telegraph History at New Skyscraper Terminal in New York City." *Telegraph and Telephone Age* 17 (Oct. 6, 1930), 459-560.
- "Western Union Telegraph Building." *American Architect* 134 (Sept. 20, 1928), 365, ill.
- Western Union Telegraph Company. *Annual Reports*. 1924-30.
- _____. *Dots and Dashes*. "World's Largest Telegraph Building to Alter New York's Skyline," 4 (August, 1928), 1-2; "New Telegraph Capitol of America Now Complete," 6 (Oct., 1930), 1-2; "Telegraph Capitol of America," 6 (Nov., 1930), 1.
- "Western Union Telegraph Company Moves Into Its Magnificent New York Skyscraper Headquarters, The Biggest Telegraph Building in the World." *Telegraph and Telephone Age* 17 (Sept. 1, 1930), 387-390.



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

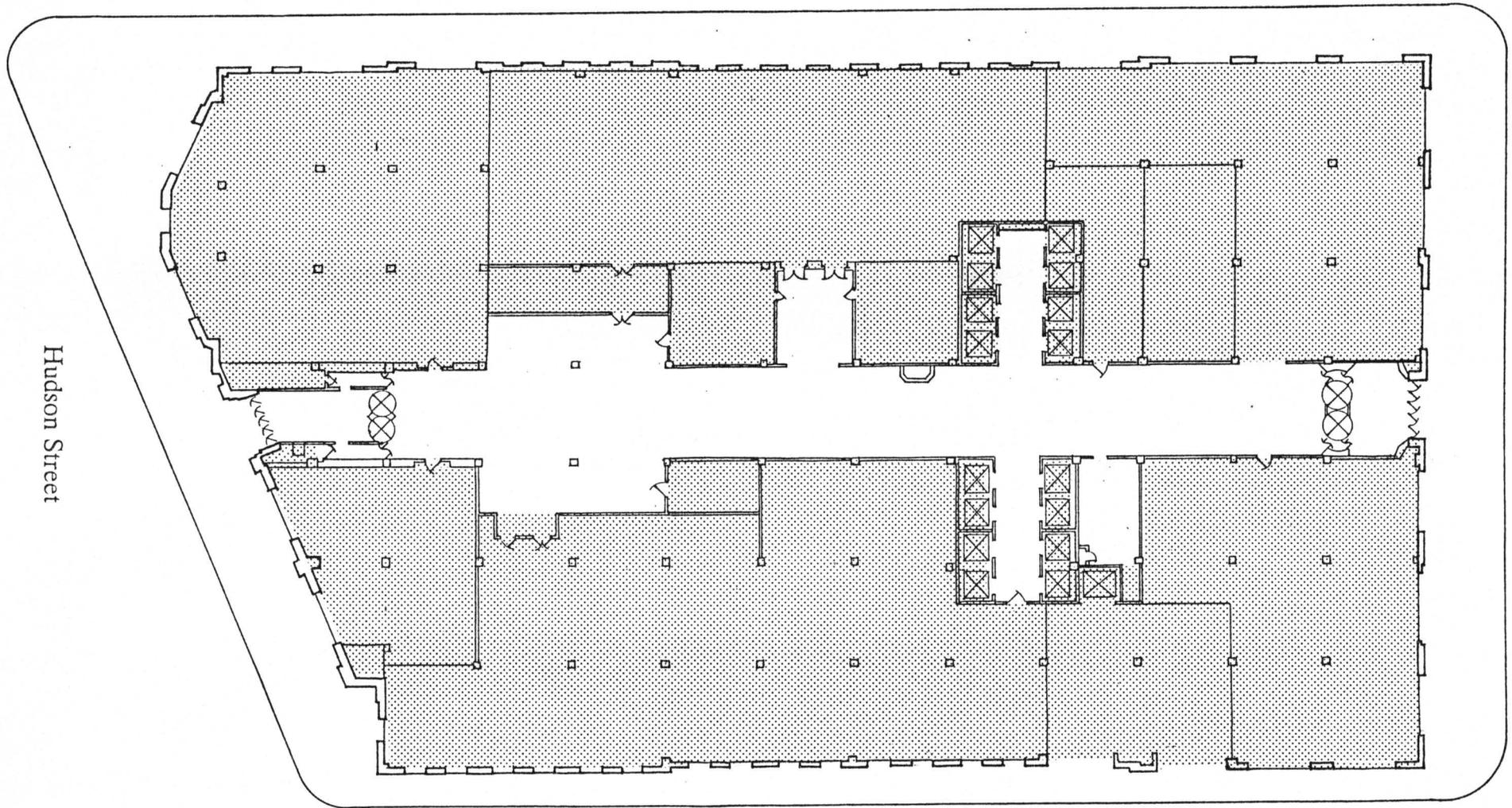
Graphic Source: Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1988-89 Ed.

WESTERN UNION BUILDING

FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR

60 Hudson Street

Worth Street

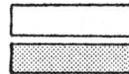


Hudson Street

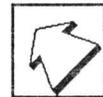
West Broadway

Thomas Street

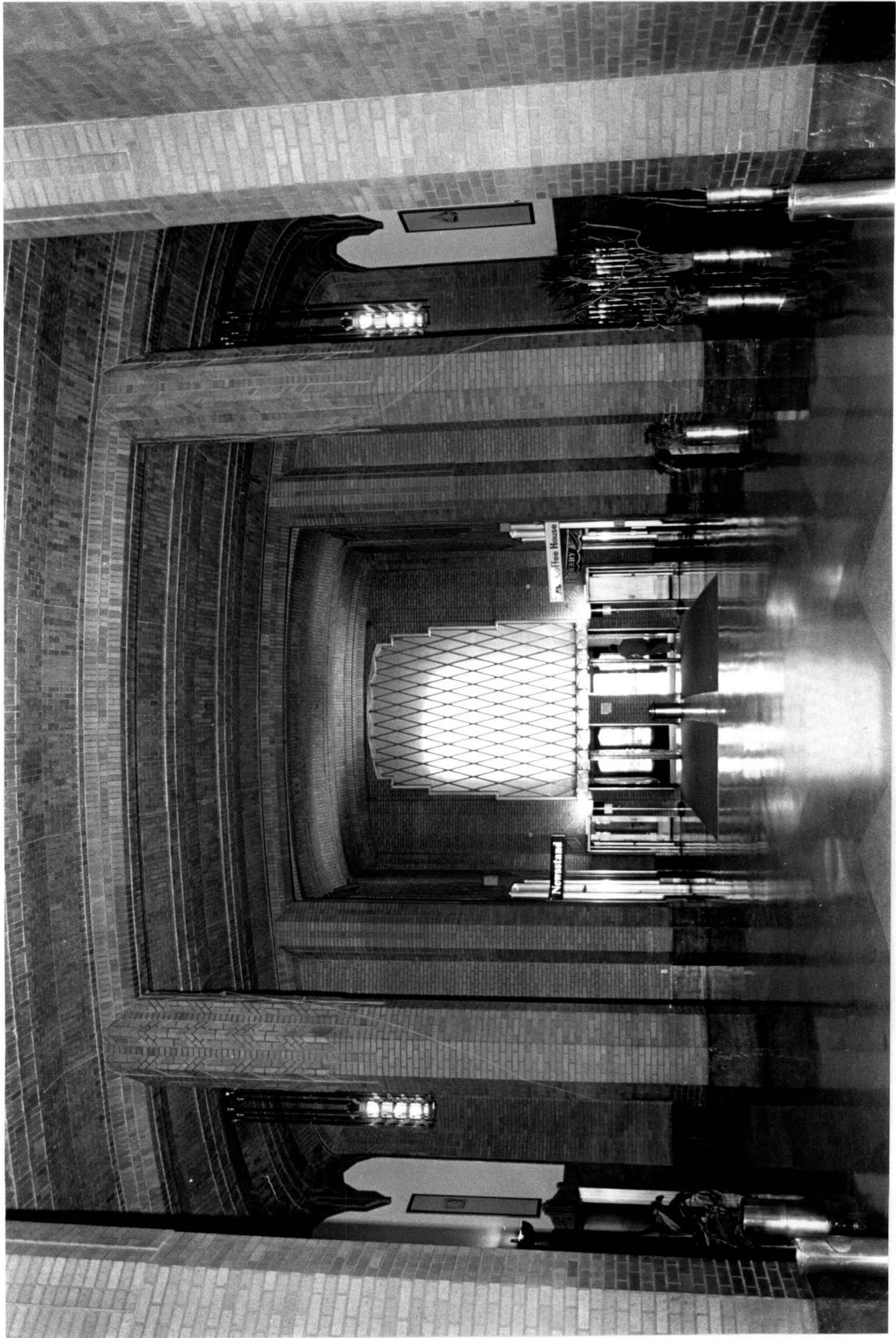
Designated Area
Area not Designated



October 1, 1991

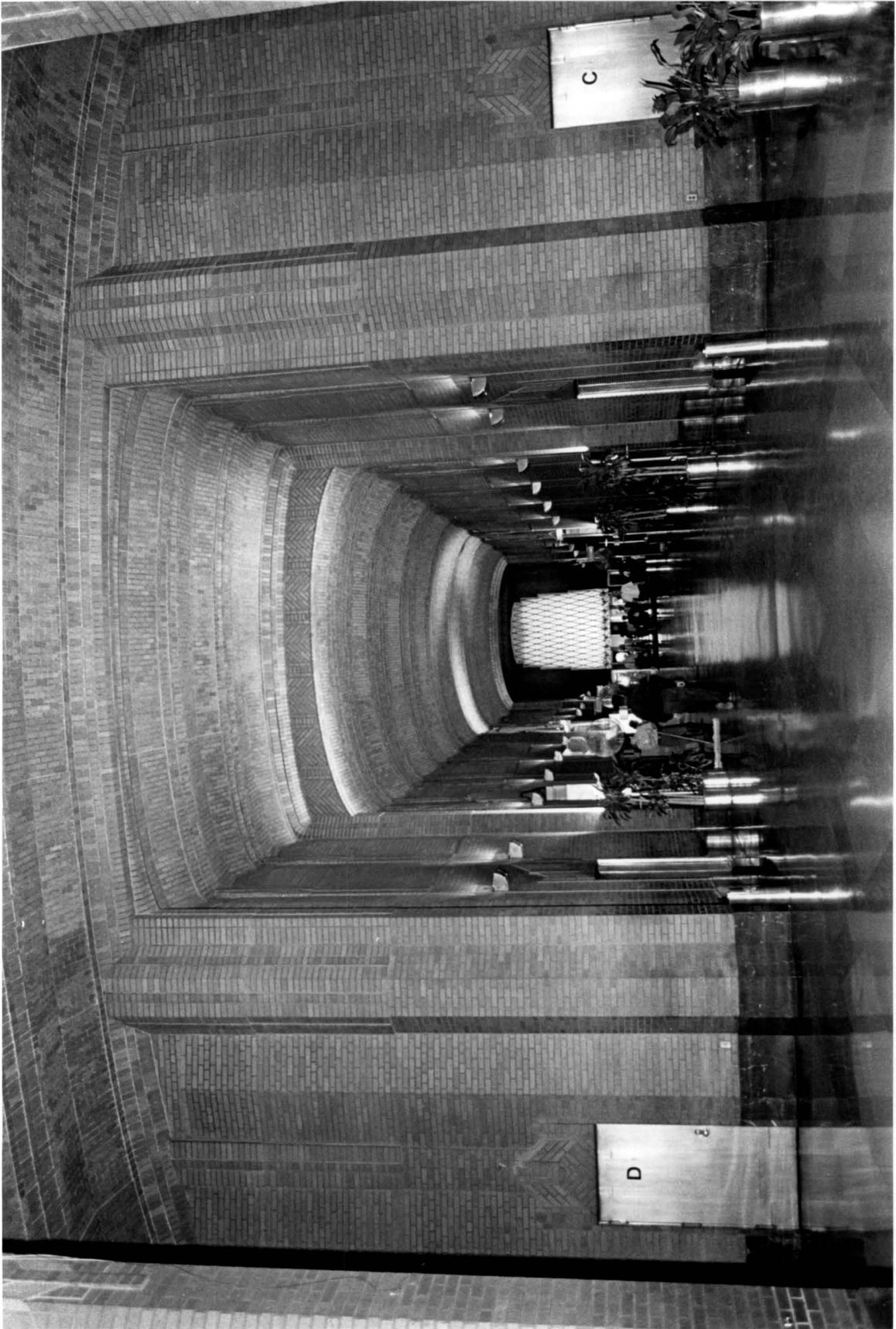


North



First Floor Interior, Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Entrance Hall and Hudson Street Vestibule.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



First Floor Interior, Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Main corridor.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



First Floor Interior, Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Entrance hall.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



First Floor Interior, Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Elevator lobby.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



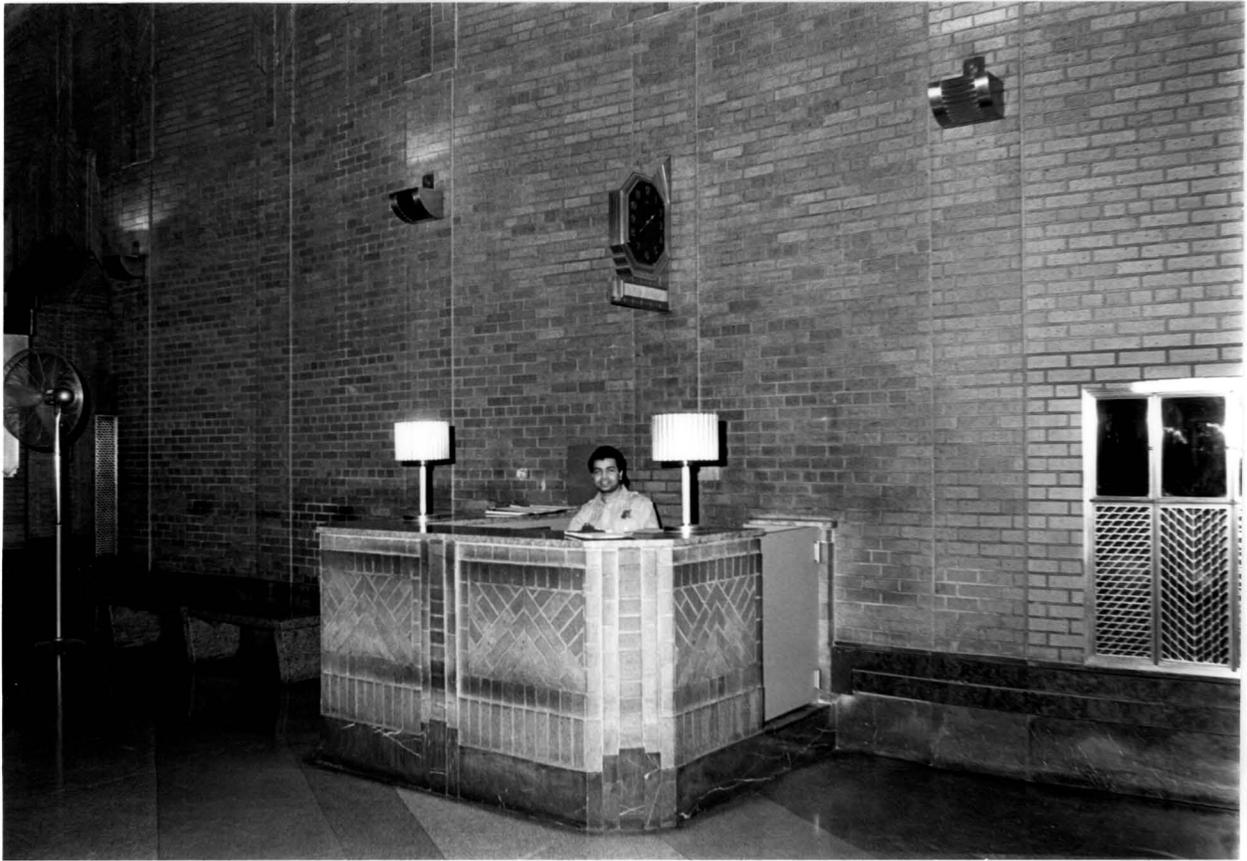
First Floor Interior, Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Auditorium lobby.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



First Floor Interior, Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.
Telephone alcove.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



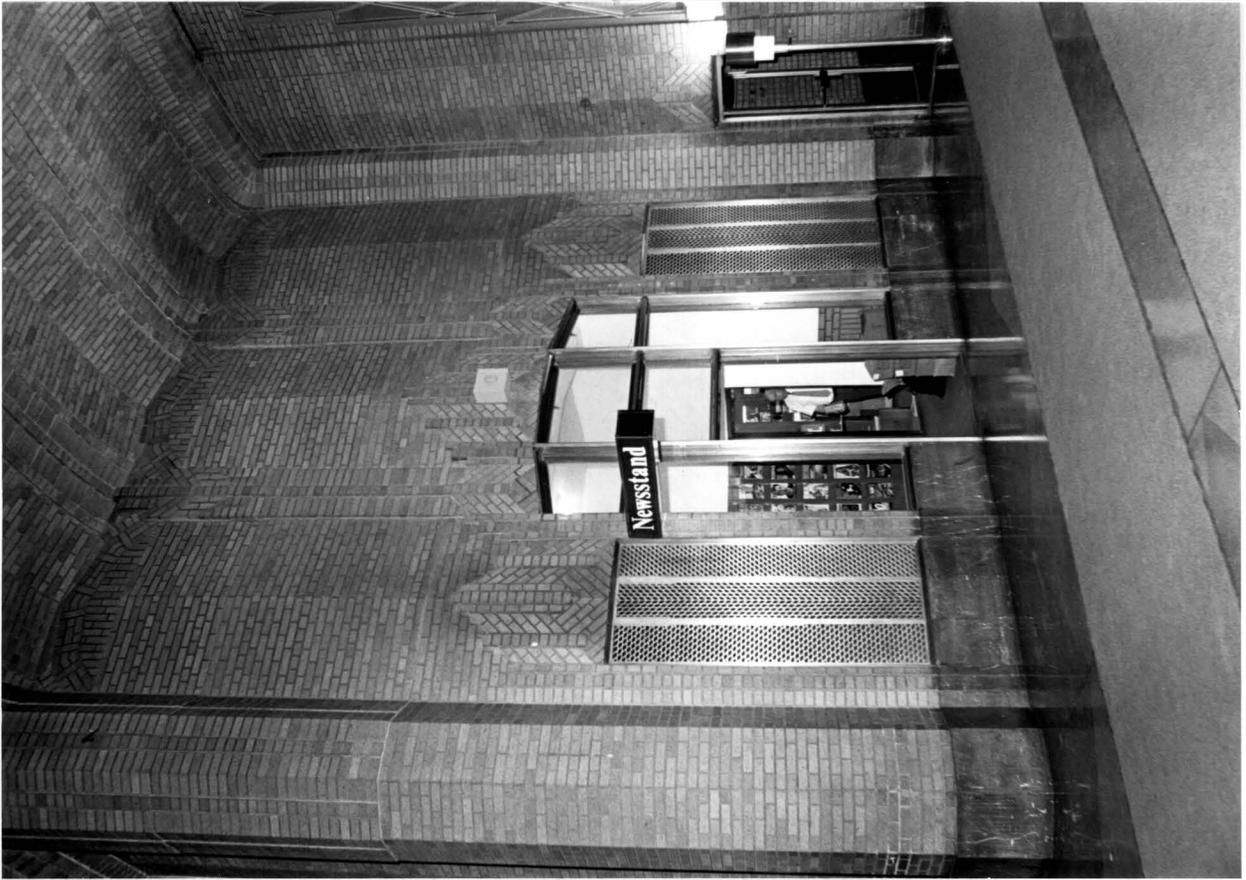
First Floor Interior, Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Reception desk, main corridor.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



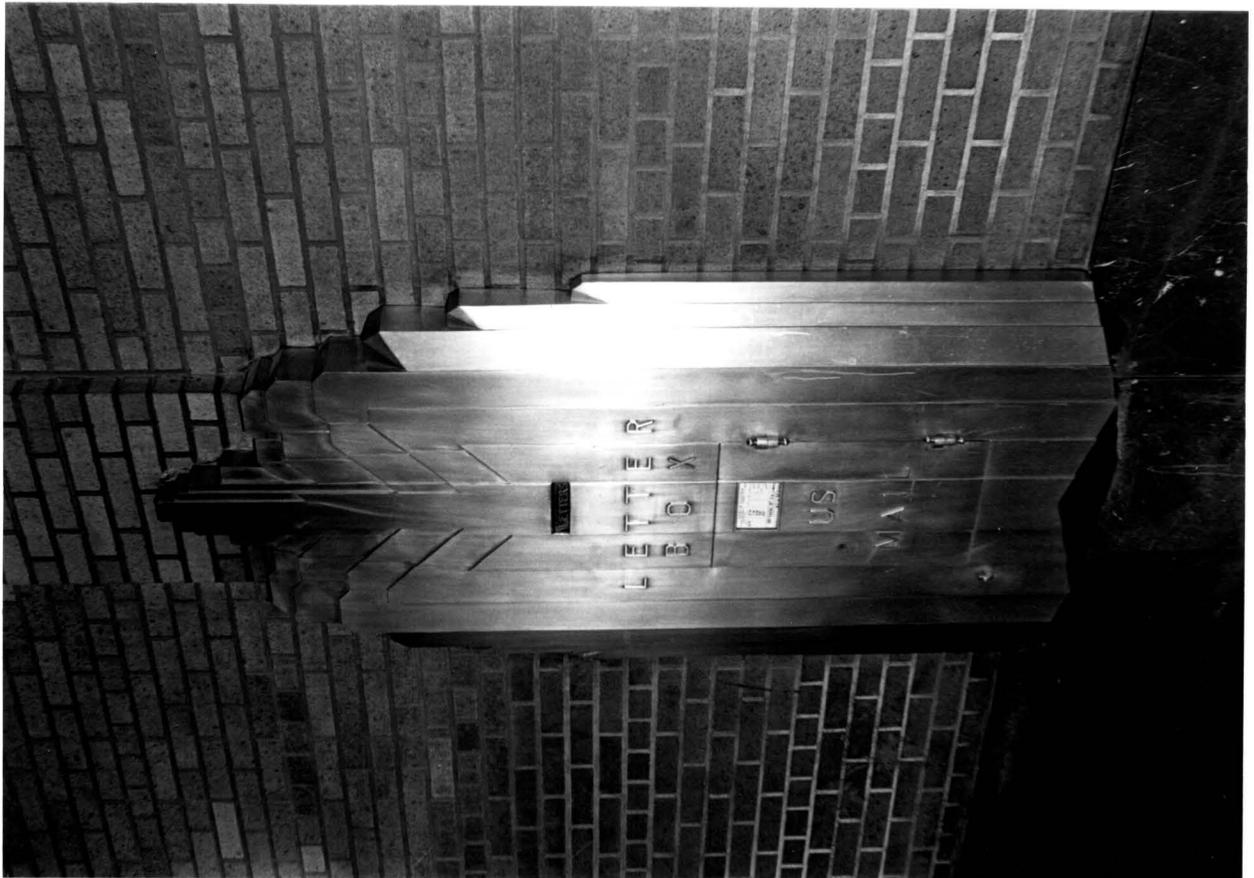
First Floor Interior, Western Union Building, 60 Hudson Street. 1928-1930.
Faceted bronze trim, main corridor.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



First Floor Interior, Western Union Building.
Retail entrance, main corridor.

Photo credit: Carl Forster



First Floor Interior, Western Union Building.
Mailbox, main corridor.

Photo credit: Carl Forster