DELMONICO’S BUILDING, 56 Beaver Street (aka 2-6 South William Street, and 56-58 Beaver Street), Manhattan. Built 1890-91, James Brown Lord, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 29, Lot 82 in part consisting of the portion of the lot occupied by the Delmonico’s Building.

On Dec. 12, 1995, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Delmonico’s Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing was continued to January 30, 1996 (Item No. 5). The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eight witnesses spoke in favor of the designation including representatives of Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger, Council Member Kathryn Freed, the Municipal Art Society, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, and New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. In addition, the Commission has received a resolution from Community Board 1 in support of the designation.

Summary

Erected in 1890-91, to the designs of the prominent architect James Brown Lord, this striking Renaissance Revival restaurant and office building is the only surviving building associated with the world-famous Delmonico’s Restaurant. Founded in 1827 by Swiss-born brothers, John and Peter Delmonico, Delmonico’s was one of the first restaurants in the United States to specialize in fine Continental cuisine. When their restaurant burned in the Fire of 1835, the Delmonico brothers acquired this site, where they erected an elegant four-story building that quickly became a favorite gathering place for New York society and visiting dignitaries. In 1890 the Delmonicos replaced that building with the current eight-story building, which provided additional restaurant space as well as several office stories. Delmonico’s was Lord’s first major non-residential work and is a notable example of an architectural style for which he achieved renown. Praised by the New York Times as "admirable in its simplicity and elegance," the building is skillfully adapted to an irregular site. Faced in orange iron-spot brick, brownstone, and terracotta, the facade features giant arcades and a rounded corner bay which is distinguished by two tiers of giant columns and a semicircular entrance porch. The sensitive handling of materials, rich colors, and elaborate decorative program incorporating Renaissance motifs makes this one of the finest surviving late-nineteenth-century buildings in Manhattan’s financial district.
DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Delmonico's Restaurant

In 1827 two Swiss emigrants, the brothers John and Peter Delmonico, established a cafe serving cakes, ices, and fine wines at 23 William Street in the heart of Manhattan’s downtown business district. The cafe quickly became a favorite with New York’s European community. In 1831, the Delmonicos expanded their business, opening one of the first restaurants in the United States specializing in fine Continental cuisine at 25 William Street. New York Brahmin Abram C. Dayton remembered that:

the courteous manner of the host, coupled with his delicious dishes and moderate charges, attracted the attention, tickled the palate, and suited the pockets of some of the Knickerbocker youths, who at once acknowledged the superiority of the French and Italian cuisine as expounded and set forth by Delmonico. ... Gradually the little shop had not space to accommodate its increasing patronage. 7

In 1834, the Delmonicos established a second restaurant and small hotel at 76 Broad Street. When the William Street restaurant was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1835, which engulfed most of the Wall Street district, the Delmonicos immediately made plans to replace it with a much larger building at the intersection of Beaver, William, and South William (formerly Mill) Streets. Known popularly as the "Citadel" because of its distinctive rounded corner treatment, this Greek Revival brick building (built 1836–37) had decorative iron balconies and a marble entrance portico with four columns that were reputed to be from the doorway of a villa in Pompeii. The new building was located just a short walk from the new Stock Exchange and catered to an exclusive clientele which included the actor-theater owner James Wallack, merchant George Templeton Strong, journalist Richard Grant White, and such visiting dignitaries as Prince Louis Napoleon (the future Napoleon III). It also became a preferred setting for private entertainments, including balls and assemblies, and for small family dinners that took place in the restaurant's elegant private dining rooms.

After another fire destroyed the restaurant-hotel at 76 Broad Street, the Delmonicos opened a new hotel at 25 Broadway. Ten years later, the Delmonico family abandoned the hotel business and opened a restaurant in the exclusive Irving House Hotel at Broadway and Chambers Street. This was the first of several leaps uptown that Delmonico's made as it followed fashionable society northward, opening restaurants in the former Grinnell mansion at Fifth Avenue and 14th Street (operated 1862-1876), in the Dodsworth Studio Building at Fifth Avenue and 26th Street (1876-1899), and finally in its own magnificent building at Fifth Avenue and 44th Street (1897-1923). In addition to these restaurants in residential areas, Delmonico's continued to serve the downtown business district, opening new restaurants at 22 Broad Street (1865-1893) a few doors from the Stock Exchange, at 112-114 Broadway (1876-1886) adjoining the original Equitable Building, and at 341 Broadway (1886-91), in the dry goods district. During the 1870s and 1880s, the Beaver Street "Citadel" continued to cater to bankers, shipping merchants, and brokers.

By 1889 Delmonico's was the leading restaurant in the city and one of the most famous in the country. Credited with transforming American eating habits, its kitchens were overseen by the great chef Charles Ranhofer, who had created such renowned dishes as Baked Alaska and Lobster Newberg. Its various branches had hosted every president since Monroe and the Delmonico's had lost count of the notables who had been served in their restaurant. As the New York Sun observed, the Delmonico family had given New Yorkers "places not merely to dine at, but to talk about, to take foreigners to, places to be proud of, places which make the city attractive the world over." Charles Crist Delmonico, a grand-nephew of the original founders who had taken control of the business in 1884, was anticipating future growth. He acquired two properties at 4 and 6 South William Street, adjacent to the "Citadel," with the idea of replacing that building with a new restaurant and office building.

The downtown office district was then undergoing a building boom. In the immediate vicinity of Delmonico’s, two large buildings had gone up in the 1880s, the seven-story Cotton Exchange (built 1883-1885, demolished) at the junction of Beaver Street, William Street, and Hanover Square, and the eight-story Post Building (built 1880-81, demolished) at the intersection of Hanover Square, Exchange Place, and Broad Street, which had brought considerable business to the area. The Coffee Exchange had also purchased the property adjacent to the Cotton Exchange at 115-119 Pearl Street, and the Farmers Loan & Trust Company had acquired several lots at Beaver and William Streets, and both had announced their plans to erect new buildings. Moreover, the Produce
Exchange (built 1881-84) at Beaver Street and Bowling Green and the New York Stock Exchange at Broad Street near Wall Street were only two short blocks away. With additional restaurant space to accommodate the increasing number of potential customers in the area and several floors of rental space to take advantage of the growing office market, the new Delmonico’s building was destined for success.

James Brown Lord

The architect selected to design the new building, James Brown Lord (1859-1902) was a native New Yorker from a socially prominent family. After graduating from Princeton in 1879, Lord joined the architectural firm of William A. Potter. While with Potter’s firm, he assisted in the design of the Union Theological Seminary (1883) at Park Avenue and East 70th Street (no longer standing). In 1883 Lord began receiving commissions for private houses, which were built in New York City, Yonkers, Tuxedo Park, Roslyn, Long Island, and Bar Harbor, Maine. In 1890 Lord joined with Stanford White and Bruce Price to design the King Model Houses on West 138th and West 139th Streets between Seventh and Eighth Avenues (now included in the St. Nicholas Historic District).

In 1886 Charles Delmonico commissioned Lord to design a new branch for the restaurant in the basement and first two stories of a small office building at 341 Broadway. Though the location proved to be unpopular and the restaurant lasted for only a few years, Lord’s renovation won praise from the Real Estate Record & Guide for his skillful planning and tasteful decorations. Four years later Lord was given the commission for the Delmonico Building at Beaver and William Street, his first major non-residential work. In 1896 Charles C. Delmonico laid the cornerstone for the new Delmonico’s Building on July 10, 1890; one year later, on July 7, 1891, the new building opened to the public. Built at a cost of $360,000, the eight-story, cast-iron-and-steel-framed building contained a first floor cafe and restaurant (admired as one of the handsomest in the city), second-floor dining rooms for ladies and private parties, a eighth-floor kitchen, and rental offices on the remaining floors. Praised by the New York Times as “admirable in its simplicity and elegance,” the building’s exterior design is an excellent example of the Renaissance Revival style.

Later History

In 1893, this building became Delmonico’s sole downtown quarters when the building housing its Broad Street restaurant was sold to a developer. Charles Crist Delmonico died in 1901, but the business continued under the management of his aunt, Rosa Crist Delmonico. Following Rosa Delmonico’s death in 1904, control of the restaurant passed to Charles’s sister, Josephine Crist Delmonico. By the 1910s mounting expenses and management problems
began to take a toll on profitability, creating a rift between Josephine Delmonico and the other members of her family who were minority stockholders in the restaurant. This situation worsened considerably during World War I as disruptions in the shipping industry led to soaring prices and food shortages. The war had also created an enormous demand for downtown office space as maritime shipping companies and associated businesses began to enjoy unprecedented profits with which to expand; in August 1917 the Delmonico family agreed to sell the Beaver Street building to the American Merchant Marine Insurance Company for $500,000. Initially the Delmonico family planned to continue leasing the restaurant portion of the building, but in November 1917, shortly after the wartime rationing board called on hotels and restaurants to institute "meatless" and "wheatless" days, Delmonico’s ceased operations on Beaver Street. Josephine Delmonico continued to operate the uptown restaurant until 1919, when the business was sold. It closed in 1923, a victim of Prohibition and rising real estate values in the Grand Central district. In 1925, George S. Chappell’s guide to the restaurants of New York lamented the closing of Delmonico’s “fine restaurant” on Beaver Street, saying that “the lower city knows no such excellence now except in some of its princely luncheon clubs.” 

When the downtown restaurant closed, the lower floors of the Delmonico building were partitioned for office use. Known as Merchant Marine House, the building became the home of a number of marine insurance companies and shipping businesses. In 1920, the building was sold to the Insurance Company of North America for $1,250,000, realizing the “the largest profit for the owners that had been made on any real estate ‘turn’ in the neighborhood.” In 1934, restaurateur Oscar Tucci established Oscar’s Delmonico Restaurant (later Delmonico’s Restaurant) in the basement and first floor. Operating along the lines of the original Delmonico’s Restaurant and catering to a business clientele, the restaurant quickly became a success, expanding to the building’s second floor in 1935 and to the first floor of the adjacent four-story building at 48-54 Beaver Street in 1943 (both buildings having been acquired by the City Bank Farmers Trust Company). In 1985 a group of investors under the name of 56 Beaver-Wall Street Inc. acquired the Delmonico’s Building and 48-54 Beaver Street. Presumably, it was at that time that the buildings underwent a number of modifications including the replacement of the original window sash with one-over-one anodized aluminum windows. In 1994 the MBC Assurance Corporation acquired the building through foreclosure; although Delmonico’s Restaurant has ceased operations and the first floor is currently vacant, a variety of commercial concerns occupy the upper floors. In November 1995 the building was purchased by Time Equities, Inc.

Description

Delmonico’s is located on an irregular lot which extends fifty-five feet along Beaver Street and 126 feet along South William Street bending along South William Street and tapering to an acute angle at the junction of Beaver and South William Streets. The building conforms to this irregularly shaped site and has a rounded corner at the intersection of Beaver and South William Streets. Constructed with an internal skeleton of iron and steel, the building is faced with brownstone, orange iron-spot Roman brick, and terra cotta. Its Renaissance Revival design features a tripartite arrangement of stories, with prominent cornices establishing the divisions between the two-story base, five-story mid-section, and one-story attic. On Beaver and William Streets the mid-sections are articulated with giant arcades which focus attention on the three-bay-wide trabeated facade at the intersection of the two streets. On Beaver Street the facade is divided into a single bay (at the northeast corner of the facade) and two wider bays which contain paired windows at lower and upper floors and triple windows in the large arches. On South William Street the facade is divided into two sections: the projecting corner pavilion at the southwest corner of the facade, which is articulated with two bays containing paired windows, and a longer section in which single bays frame three wide arched bays. This clever solution creates the impression of a balanced, symmetrical design when the building is viewed from the intersection of Beaver and William Streets, while providing appropriate treatments for the facades on Beaver Street and South William Street with their varying proportions and functions. The original windows were replaced with one-over-one anodized aluminum windows in the mid-1980s. (The interior of the building is not included in this landmark designation.)

Base The first and second story are faced with a light brownstone known as "Belleville rock" above a foundation of brick and granite which has been covered with sandstone. The walls are pierced by large rectangular window openings which have simple molded surrounds.

Main Restaurant Entrance At the corner of Beaver Street and South William Street the main entrance to the restaurant is marked by a rounded portico of
Corinthian columns, which has a broad frieze embellished with the word "DELMONICO’S," and a prominent balustrade. Flanking the doorway are two columns, salvaged from the 1835 Delmonico’s building on this site, which are reputedly ancient artifacts brought to New York from Pompeii by John Delmonico. The marble cornice above the door may have also been salvaged from the earlier building, perhaps from its crowning cornice. The doorway has historic paneled wood reveals edged with an egg and dart molding. Historic paired paneled wood doors are fitted with Aesthetic Period handles and etched glass lights. The historic wood transom also has a single etched glass light.

**Office Entrance** On Beaver Street the classical orders framing the office entrance bay have been simplified and the wall has been stuccoed; however the stucco has been removed from the arched opening which has splayed stone jambs decorated with boldly modeled classical moldings. The stoop in front of the doorway has been faced with pink granite which matches the granite walls around the planter to the west of the entry. The historic infill and doors in this entrance have been replaced with plate glass elements. Above the doorway, volute-shaped relief panels frame a pair of windows which are capped by a broad frieze embellished with a recently installed metal plaque labeled, "56 Beaver Street."

**Secondary Dining Room Entrance** On South William Street, the secondary dining room entrance is approached by a brownstone stoop; its cheek walls support decorative wrought-iron railings and posts which appear to be original. The doorway’s carved stone surround is richly ornamented with Renaissance motifs. Although the door has been replaced, the entry still has its original paneled wood reveals. The transom above the door is supported by a brownstone transom bar and retains its original wood surround; the window has been replaced by louvered infill. At the southwest corner of the South William Street facade, two window bays were modified to create doorways in the 1980s. The lamp posts flanking the corner and South William Street restaurant entrances and the lamps flanking the office entrance on Beaver Street probably date from the early twentieth century, but they were not installed at this building until after 1940. The striped awnings at the first story windows and balloon awning above the Beaver Street entrance date from the 1980s. Historic photographs show that originally retractable awnings were placed at many of the windows.

**Midsection** The brick midsection of the building is trimmed in brownstone and terra cotta. Two-story engaged brownstone colonnades articulate the curved corner which is also decorated with foliated spandrel panels. The brick side walls are articulated with tall arches set off by quoins composed of terra-cotta panels enriched with a checkerboard relief pattern that creates a "rusticated" effect. Foliated terra-cotta panels decorate the length of the seventh story except at the corner bay which is faced with brownstone relief panels decorated with arabesques. The seventh story is crowned by a strongly projecting modillioned cornice (a section of the cornice on the southeastern corner of the South William Street facade has been removed).

**Upper Section** The brick eighth-story attic is articulated with slender pilasters which are richly ornamented with arabesques. The pilasters support a modest terminal cornice. The balustrade which once edged the roofline has been removed. Original brick chimneys are visible at the west corner of the Beaver Street facade and the east corner of the South William Street facade. In addition, a brick penthouse has recently been reconstructed on the west end of the building near Beaver Street.

**Rear Walls** Portions of the building’s original courtyard walls are visible above 48-54 Beaver Street when the buildings are viewed from the north side of Beaver Street. (48-54 Beaver Street is not included in this designation.) These walls are faced with common red brick and are pierced by square window openings which contain paired one-over-one anodized aluminum windows. The west wall has been painted and retains traces of a very faded advertising mural. The upper portion of this wall has been rebuilt.

Report prepared by Gale Harris, Research Department

### NOTES

2. Quoted in Thomas, 17.


7. For a contemporary description of the new Delmonico’s building see "A New Delmonico’s," New York Times, May 18, 1890, 13. See also Thomas, 227-228. The building was illustrated soon after its opening in the American Architect and Building News 42 (Nov. 25, 1893), 103; and King’s Handbook of New York City (Boston: Moses King, 1893), 239.

8. The cellar contained dressing rooms for the waiters, an extensive wine cellar, elevator pumps, and a dynamo to power the building’s "brilliant electric lights" which were reflected in its "many mirrors." See "A New Delmonico’s," 13.

9. Ibid.


14. In 1955, Oscar’s Oldelmonico began leasing the second floor of the building at 48-54 Beaver Street. At that time a number of changes were made to link the buildings internally. (Nos. 48-54 Beaver Street are not part of this designation).
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 Delmonico’s Building has a special character, and 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 Delmonico’s Building, erected in 1890-91, is the only surviving building associated with the world-famous Delmonico’s Restaurant; that this striking Renaissance Revival building designed by the prominent architect James Brown Lord is one of the finest surviving late-nineteenth-century buildings in Manhattan’s financial district; that Delmonico’s, founded in 1827 by brothers John and Peter Delmonico, was one of the first restaurants in the United States to specialize in fine Continental cuisine; that Delmonico’s has occupied this site since 1835 when the Delmonico brothers erected an elegant four-story restaurant building that quickly became a favorite gathering place for New York society and visiting dignitaries; that the Delmonicos replaced that building with the current eight-story building which provided additional restaurant space as well as several office stories to take advantage of the booming market for office space in the area; that Delmonico’s was Lord’s first major non-residential building and is a notable example of an architectural style for which he was renowned; that Lord’s design is skillfully adapted to an irregular site and is notable for its sensitive handling of materials, rich colors, and elaborate decorative program of Renaissance motifs.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Delmonico’s Building, 56 Beaver Street (aka 2-6 South William Street, and 56-58 Beaver Street), Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 29, Lot 82 in part consisting of the portion of the lot occupied by the Delmonico’s Building.
Delmonico’s Building
56 Beaver Street
(aka 2-6 South William Street and 56-58 Beaver Street)
Manhattan
Photo: Carl Forster
View of the Delmonico Building, c. 1891
Source: Delmonico's: A Century of Splendor
View of the original Delmonico's restaurant building at Beaver and William Streets (built 1836-37), popularly known as the "Citadel"

Source: Delmonico's: A Century of Splendor
Delmonico's Building
South William Street Facade
Photo: Carl Forster
Delmonico's Building
Details of the South William Street Entrance
Photos: Carl Forster
Delmonico's Building
Ornamental details on the Upper stories of the rounded corner facade
Photos: Carl Forster
Delmonico’s Building
Details of the Restaurant and Beaver Street office entrances

Photos: Carl Forster
Delmonico's Building
Details of the upper stories on Beaver Street
Photos: Carl Forster
Delmonico's Building
56 Beaver Street
(aka 2-6 South William Street and 56-58 Beaver Street)
Manhattan
Landmark Site: Manhattan Tax Map Bl. 29, Lot 82 in part
Source: Sanborn Manhattan Landbook, 1994-95
Delmonico's Building, 56 Beaver Street (aka 2-6 South William Street and 56-58 Beaver Street), Manhattan, Tax Map Block 29, Lot 82

The Landmark Site consisting of the portion of the lot occupied by the Delmonico's Building

Source: New York City Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map