

**HOTEL WOLCOTT**, 4 West 31 Street (aka 4-10 West 31 Street), Manhattan  
Built: 1902-04; Architect: John H. Duncan

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 832, Lot 49

On October 26, 2010 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Hotel Wolcott and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.1).The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were three speakers in favor of designation including a representative of Assemblyman Gottfried and representatives of the Historic District Council and the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society of America. There were no speakers in opposition.

### Summary

The Beaux Arts style Hotel Wolcott is a distinctive early 20<sup>th</sup>-century hotel in midtown Manhattan, located close to numerous sites for entertainment, business and shopping as well as various transportation methods. Designed by the prominent architect John H. Duncan, the hotel served as a meeting place for many important political events such as LaGuardia's inaugural ball, and was the long-term residence of well-known people such as Isadora Duncan and Doris Duke. The hotel was typical of the midtown hotels of the period in the variety and quality of its accommodations but stood out for its distinctive classical French Beaux Arts style consisting of over-scaled keystones, brackets and cartouches, rendered with the sure hand of a master architect. Faced in pink brick and limestone with a substantial copper-covered mansard roof, the building provides a solid and graceful facade in this busy part of the city. Duncan is best known for his designs for the General Ulysses S. Grant National Memorial as well as the Soldiers' and Sailor's Memorial Arch in Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn. He is also responsible for numerous classically-styled and distinguished homes for wealthy New Yorkers, particularly in midtown and the Upper East Side. At the Hotel Wolcott, Duncan created a unique classical design, appropriate for the exuberance of the period, and one that gives a distinctive presence to this building which continues to fulfill the same functions for which it was designed, more than 100 years ago.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Development of the Area<sup>1</sup>

In the decades before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area around Broadway and West 34<sup>th</sup> Street, known as Herald Square, gained prominence as the city's most important entertainment district. As with the city's residential districts, this section had moved progressively northward, in this case along Broadway, from Union Square to Madison Square and then Herald Square.<sup>2</sup> "All the world came to Broadway to shop, to flirt, to dine, to gamble, to find amusement and to meet acquaintances..."<sup>3</sup> Local attractions included theaters, such as Madison Square Garden (1897, replaced 1889-91 by McKim, Mead & White building, demolished), the Metropolitan Opera House (1883, Broadway and 39<sup>th</sup> Street, demolished), the Casino Theatre (1882, 39<sup>th</sup> Street, demolished) and Harrigan's Theater (later Herald Square Theater). The area of Broadway between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street came to be called "The Great White Way" because of all the electric lights along this section of the street.

Attracted by the crowds who attended the shows, restaurants and hotels moved northward into this area as well. Rector's and Delmonico's restaurants were among the first to open nearby to satisfy the gastronomical needs of the area's patrons. The first hotel in the area was Gilsey House (1869-71, Stephen Decatur Hatch, a designated New York City Landmark) at Broadway and 29<sup>th</sup> Street. Soon afterward, the Albemarle, the St. James the Victoria (all demolished) and the Grand (a designated New York City Landmark) opened in the area.

Retail businesses followed the northward movement also, from Ladies Mile and other more southerly locations. Rogers, Peet & Company moved to 1260 Broadway in 1889, while R.H. Macy's opened their large store on Herald Square in 1902. Fifth Avenue also attracted businesses, replacing the town houses of wealthy families. B. Altman's opened its large store at 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue in 1904, followed slightly later by Tiffany's and Gorham Silver.

As these changes came to the avenues, the streets between them were also affected. Previously the location for large, individual homes, these streets, due to their proximity to these active and newly developing sections, began to attract larger institutions, such as clubs and hotels. This development was also spurred by the various new transportation lines and stations that made the area more easily accessible. These included crosstown streetcars on 34<sup>th</sup> Street, the Sixth Avenue Elevated trains, the Hudson Tubes to New Jersey, and the new Pennsylvania Station on Seventh Avenue.

In addition to those earlier hotels already mentioned, scores of new hotels and apartment hotels opened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the classical palazzo Hotel Imperial (1889-91, Broadway and 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, McKim, Mead and White, demolished), the Holland House, called "one of the most opulent and luxurious hotels in city"<sup>4</sup> (1891, Harding & Gooch, Fifth Avenue and 30<sup>th</sup> Street, demolished), the Waldorf Hotel (1891-93, Henry J. Hardenburgh, 1895-97 expanded as Waldorf Astoria, Fifth Ave and 34<sup>th</sup> Street, demolished), the Hotel Royalton (1898, Rossiter & Wright, 44 West 44<sup>th</sup> Street), the Hotel Martinique (1897-98, expanded 1901-03, 1909-11, Henry J. Hardenbergh, Broadway and 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, a designated New York City Landmark), the Aberdeen Hotel, (1902-04, Harry B. Mulliken, 17 West 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, a designated New York City Landmark), and the Hotel Breslin (1903-04, Broadway and 29<sup>th</sup> Street, Clinton & Russell, located within the Madison Square North Historic District).

## Hotels in New York<sup>5</sup>

Hotels have played an important role in the life of the city since the earliest taverns and inns of New Amsterdam dispensed food, drink, lodging and entertainment to colonial travelers. As the hotels established themselves in these new, more northerly districts, the hotels themselves gradually added more lavish facilities and comforts. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, hotels had reached an extreme degree of size and luxury, epitomized by Henry J. Hardenbergh's Waldorf and Astoria Hotels (which functioned as one hotel) on Fifth Avenue at 34<sup>th</sup> Street with 1,300 bedrooms and 40 public rooms, all lavishly and individually decorated.

The Waldorf and Astoria complex was the largest, but it was not the only grand hotel of that period. Fostered by economic prosperity, many large luxury hotels became the venue for public life, providing halls for promenading, dining rooms to be seen in, and private rooms in which to entertain and be entertained.<sup>6</sup> Hotels could provide the comforts of home combined with the luxuries of the city. New establishments were built with all the latest technology, including electricity, elevators, telephones and central heat. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a tendency to "include within the walls of the building all the possible comforts of modern life, facilities which formerly could be found only outside hotel walls. . . Telephones, Turkish baths, private nurses, physicians ..." <sup>7</sup> as well as laundry service, maids, valets, barbers, and shoe shine boys. A large staff was required to supply such services, which in turn necessitated a building large enough to make the whole enterprise financially sound.<sup>8</sup>

The economic expansion at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created a situation that called for a variety in location and type as well as the number of New York hotels.<sup>9</sup> Improvements in transportation during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century made travel between and within cities easier, and people became more mobile, traveling for pleasure as well as for business. The older hotels and those downtown catered particularly to businessmen, while those in midtown (particularly on or near Broadway) generally were intended for people who came to New York for pleasure trips. The proprietors of these hotels "naturally devote much of their convenient space to their bars and restaurants, which, of course, offer attractions to residents as well as non-residents..."<sup>10</sup> The Waldorf-Astoria and other hotels farther north on Fifth Avenue (such as the St. Regis and the Hotel Astor) developed a reputation for attracting the most fashionable New Yorkers.<sup>11</sup>

On the exterior, New York hotels of this period developed their own particular style that put them "in a different class architecturally from any similar buildings which have preceded them."<sup>12</sup> A. C. David described them as being skyscrapers (i.e. steel-frame construction), but created "in such a manner that it would be distinguished from the office-building and suggest some relation to domestic life."<sup>13</sup> Following the stylistic precedent set by Hardenbergh on his influential Waldorf and Astoria hotels, David also recommended that hotels be built of warm-colored brick with elaborate ornament and a strong roofline. He believed that the inclusion of a mansard roof with dormer windows created a more domestic appearance.

## Planning the Hotel Wolcott

The Hotel Wolcott was among the many hotels constructed in this central part of Manhattan at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Typical of this neighborhood, the Wolcott was sited next to the Mechanical Engineers' Library Association building<sup>14</sup> and across the street from the Hebrew National Restaurant, patronized by Jewish showmen such as Lou Siegel, Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, and Al Jolson.<sup>15</sup> Located just off Fifth Avenue, the Wolcott was quieter than hotels facing directly on Fifth Avenue or Broadway, but still convenient to numerous activities and transportation.

The developer of the hotel, William C. Dewey, purchased three lots on West 31<sup>st</sup> Street (lots 49, 50, 52) in 1902 from the Alvord estate.<sup>16</sup> Alonzo Alvord had owned the property since 1851 and had erected a three-story house and stable on the property. Dewey announced that he intended to construct a “12 story hotel” on the property, which was 100 feet west of Fifth Avenue. Presumably he had grand plans for this hotel, hiring the prominent architect John H. Duncan for the new building. He named the hotel after Henry Roger Wolcott (1846-1921).<sup>17</sup> Wolcott came from a prominent Massachusetts family (one of his ancestors was a signer of the Declaration of Independence) but he and several siblings moved to Colorado. He was a successful businessman in the mining industry in Colorado, becoming treasurer of the Colorado Smelting & Mining Company and was elected a director of the Equitable Life Assurance Society. His brother Edward served as US Senator from Colorado and Henry also became involved in politics, elected for one term as a Republican state senator (and for a period serving as the acting governor of the state). Henry then ran for governor on an anti-silver ticket and was defeated. Henry Wolcott was heavily involved in philanthropy and was a member of numerous clubs in Denver as well as in New York and Boston, where he was well known.<sup>18</sup>

### William C. Dewey

Little is known about the background of developer William C. Dewey. Previous to his arrival in New York in 1891 Dewey lived in Springfield, Massachusetts where he was the president of the Palmer Carpet Company.<sup>19</sup> His first appearance in New York directories gives his home as Stanford, Connecticut. By 1893 he was living in New York and was listed as a broker. His profession was noted as real estate in 1896-97 and in 1900 as “pianos.” In the early 1900s Dewey developed several midtown buildings, including a five-story dwelling on Greenwich Street, a five-story club house on East 62<sup>nd</sup> Street, and a ten-story flat building on Broadway at 80<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>20</sup>

Dewey’s younger brother James H. Dewey was an architect who designed several of his buildings.<sup>21</sup> Although William Dewey owned “considerable property” in New York,<sup>22</sup> his work as a developer was short-lived. A 1905 suit brought by the American Mortgage Company resulted in the foreclosure of the Hotel Wolcott, which was then sold at auction.<sup>23</sup> In 1908 another foreclosure suit was brought against Dewey, this time related to the building on Broadway and 80<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>24</sup> No further information on Dewey has been available.

### John H. Duncan (1854-1929)<sup>25</sup>

John Duncan, a founding member of the Architectural League of New York in 1881, was a popular architect at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries who gained fame for his designs of large public monuments. After study in his hometown of Binghamton, New York and abroad, Duncan established his own architectural practice in New York in 1886 and shortly thereafter won the competition to design the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Memorial Arch on Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn (1889-92), dedicated to the men who fought in the Union Forces during the Civil War. In 1890, Duncan won the competition to design the General Grant National Memorial, more familiarly known as Grant’s Tomb (constructed 1891-97). Duncan also created the monument to the Battle of Trenton in New Jersey in 1894. The designs of all of these monuments were inspired by Classical Greek and Roman architecture (the first two are designated New York City Landmarks). The reputation Duncan gained from winning these prestigious competitions from among many other prominent architects likely contributed to his commissions for residential and commercial work for wealthy New Yorkers. These include houses in the Upper East Side

Historic District, the Metropolitan Museum Historic District and in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District. Duncan also designed the building for the Knox Hat Company (452 Fifth Avenue, 1901-02), as well as the John Peirce Residence (11 East 51<sup>st</sup> Street, 1904-6) and the 7 West 54<sup>th</sup> Street House (1899-1900, all designated New York City Landmarks). He designed a four-story brick building for the Tilden Club at 1228-30 Broadway (demolished) which used the Roebling System of construction, as well as numerous buildings for the Goelet estate. Apart from his monumental work, much of his work displayed the Beaux Arts or Classical French style, featuring prominent mansard roofs, rustication on the lower floors, exuberant, large scale ornament, and heavy balustrades or cornices typical of the style.

### Hotel Wolcott

While still under construction, the hotel was leased to James Breslin, a well-known New York hotelier.<sup>26</sup> His 21-year lease was worth over \$2,000,000<sup>27</sup> and helped assure the hotel's initial success. Breslin had run the Gilsey House for many years, and served as president of the Gilsey House Company, backed by William K. Vanderbilt. He was quite active in the business, with financial interests in numerous hotels, including the St. James, the Metropolitan, the Grand Union in Saratoga, New York, the Auditorium in Chicago and the Breslin in Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey. Breslin took an apartment in the newly opened Hotel Wolcott, where he died in 1906. In his obituary he was celebrated as "the ideal hotel man."<sup>28</sup>

Dewey had trouble acquiring the structural steel necessary for construction of this building, causing him to look to Europe for supplies.<sup>29</sup> This delay possibly was the reason for the unusually long period of construction for the hotel, which in turn, made Dewey unable to pay his creditors. In 1905, foreclosure action against William Dewey resulted in the sale of the hotel, although Breslin's lease to operate the hotel was maintained.<sup>30</sup> During the following years, the hotel was purchased by a series of hotel operators, beginning with the Record Realty Company. In 1923, it was purchased by the Wolcott Operating Corporation, run by William and Julius Manger who, under the name of Manger Hotels, owned several facilities in New York and elsewhere. They owned it until 1932.<sup>31</sup> Beginning in 1932, the hotel was owned by Hotel Wolcott, Inc, run by Hyman Portnof,<sup>32</sup> who also ran a chain of New York hotels, including the Hotel Park Plaza on the Upper West Side, the Stratford Hotel (11 E. 32<sup>nd</sup> Street), and the Grand Union Hotel (34 East 32<sup>nd</sup> Street).<sup>33</sup> Major alterations were performed on the building under Portnof, including the addition of decorative copper balconies.<sup>34</sup>

The hotel aimed its primary business toward travelers, promising in its initial brochure to send someone to the station to pick up trunks and have them packed and unpacked for the guests.<sup>35</sup> The 1923 guidebook, *Riders New York City* mentioned that the hotel "specializes in personal service and attentions" with "special attention to ladies traveling alone."<sup>36</sup> From the beginning however, the hotel also provided the option of long-term residency. Some of the well-known residents of the hotel included Isadora Duncan,<sup>37</sup> Oscar Hammerstein's widow, tobacco tycoon James Buchanan Duke,<sup>38</sup> Edith Wharton,<sup>39</sup> and Henry Miller.<sup>40</sup> According to the hotel website, some other, perhaps less well-known long-term inhabitants of the hotel included: Finis Marshall, president of the Phoenix National Bank; Phillip J. Dwyer, an owner of the Aqueduct racetrack as well as of the legendary race horse Hindoo; and Harry L. West, author of the a series of popular books about an English butler, *Ruggles of Red Gap*.

In addition to its famous guests, the hotel was the scene of numerous historical events. It served as a meeting place for several important negotiations, including the purchase of the Yankees by Col. Jake Ruppert and Col. Tillinghast Huston in 1914.<sup>41</sup> The kitchens of the hotel

were used by the Corning Glassware Company in 1908 to test its new glass ovenware since a Corning salesman was the son-in-law of the hotel's manager at the time.<sup>42</sup> The ballroom of the hotel was the scene of Fiorello La Guardia's inaugural ball in 1938. More recently, Buddy Holly and the Everly Brothers stayed at the Hotel Wolcott in 1958 while recording their music at the Beltone Studios, which was located in the building.<sup>43</sup>

### Style of the Wolcott Hotel

John Duncan came to be known for his bold and often flamboyant designs. The Wolcott Hotel, designed in the Beaux Arts style with over-scaled decorative elements fits into this type. Named for the famous architectural school, the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, this style of architecture was brought to this country by the many Americans who studied there. It became popular in the United States during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as American tastes demanded more classical designs, encouraged by the architecture and planning first displayed at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the organization and specific order suggested by classical ideas were important but architects and their clients were often content to get their ornamental inspiration from multiple sources, and were sometimes interested in applying a lavish amount of decoration to a building, in order to suggest the erudition of the owner and designer. Often moving toward a degree of baroque classicism, buildings in this style usually featured a rusticated stone base, heavy, paired brackets, columns, balconies, and an elaborate mansard roof with embellished dormer windows.

The Wolcott Hotel uses classical ideas of symmetry in its facade arrangement, with a central entrance enhanced by a large marquee. The two central bays of the building are also emphasized by the insertion of projecting iron oriel windows. The facade is divided by cornices into a base, mid-section and finishing element. Here the base, typical of a Beaux Arts style building, is faced with rusticated stone while the third through the eighth floors (the main body) are mostly identical, faced with pink brick with stone quoins and organized by string courses and vertical piers. The ninth floor is a transitional story, faced completely in stone. It appears slightly recessed, thus emphasizing the main projecting copper cornice with its paired brackets, and huge dentils. The 10<sup>th</sup> story is hardly visible above the cornice, but is again a transitional level rising to the elaborate mansard roof with its multiple and varied windows. (The mansard roof has been covered with standing seam copper that covers the original decorative details around the windows and the elaborate row of finials along the ridge of the roof has been removed.) The facade is given special emphasis by several huge ornamental features, including elaborate cartouches and embellished keystone above the main entrance, and cartouches with heads at the eighth and ninth stories. Another large cartouche with the carved name Wolcott is centrally located between the eighth and ninth stories, directly above the main entrance. These carved stone ornaments are out of scale with the rest of the building but are designed to make it unique and eye-catching on its narrow, side-street location. Since there were so many new hotels in this area at this time, Duncan's design makes this one truly distinctive.

### Description

The Hotel Wolcott is a Beaux Arts style, 12-story building arranged in an H-plan, with two light courts at the center of the lot opening to the east and west. The pink brick and limestone facade is six bays wide, symmetrically arranged around a central main entrance. A deep mansard roof with two stories of dormer windows sits above a prominent cornice above the ninth floor. The two central bays on the third through the eighth floors have rounded, projecting iron oriel

windows. Over-scaled stone ornamental features such as keystones, brackets, heads and cartouches provide accents to the facade.

*Historic:*

Rusticated limestone facing on 2 lowest floors; double-height ground story; large central entrance flanked by short walls supporting metal and glass light fixtures; entrance has round-arched opening topped by stone shield and putti with over-scaled keystone; small, secondary entrances fronted by small rounded stoops on each bay to the side of main entrance; entrance to west of main has historic wood-and-glass door; two original 1/1 metal sash windows in westernmost bays; carved heraldic heads supporting stone balconnettes at second story; stone string courses above 2<sup>rd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> stories; rounded tri-partite metal oriels project from window openings in two center bays of 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> stories; projecting copper cornice with dentils and paired brackets above 9<sup>th</sup> story; carved stone window surrounds, keystones, heads, and cartouches; side walls above neighboring buildings on both sides plain brick with minimal window openings; ornamented window openings onto light courts facing center of building.

*Alterations:*

New entrances on ground floor: easternmost bay has 2-door service entrance; 2<sup>nd</sup> bay on east has sliding glass-and-metal entrance door approached by concrete ramp topped by plain glass light fixture; metal railings to each side of ramp; 3<sup>rd</sup> bay has replacement metal-and-glass door; central glass-and-metal entrance doors topped by glass transom; wall-mounted cameras flank entrance; bronze plaque next to main entrance "The Wolcott;" non-historic marquee over main entrance supported on metal piping; marquee has downlights and central skylight; attached to wall above with metal rods; opening to west of main entrance has fan set in transom; alarm with metal conduit above door; western window has permanent air conditioner on wooden supports; most windows changed to 1/1 metal sash; copper cladding on mansard; decorative copper balconies added in front of most windows; spotlights attached to wall with conduit between at base of 3<sup>rd</sup> story, between stone balconnettes; mansard and dormers covered with standing seam copper; decorative metal trim along top of ridgeline of roof removed.

*Site:*

Building is on south side of 31<sup>st</sup> Street, at lot line, 100 feet west of Fifth Avenue, fills its entire lot; open areaway framed by historic iron railing with metal diamond-plate stairs to basement in front of two westernmost bays; metal basement door covered by grille; small louvered vent nest to door; two siamese pipe connections in front of storefront on west; double diamond plate doors to basement in sidewalk in front of store on west; metal conduit near base.

Research and writing by  
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Research Department

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Information in this section comes from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Hotel Martinique Designation Report (LP-1983)* (New York: City of New York, 1998), report written by Virginia Kurshan; LPC, *(Former) Aberdeen Hotel (LP-2076)* (New York: City of New York, 2001), report written by Donald Presa; LPC, *Gilsey House Designation Report (LP-1039)* (New York City of New York, 1979), report written by James T. Dillon; and Landmarks Preservation Commission files.

<sup>2</sup> After 1900, the entertainment center starting moving further north to Times Square.

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell Marcuse, *This was New York!* (New York: LIM Press, 1969), 180.

<sup>4</sup> LPC, *The Wilbraham Designation Report (LP-2153)* (New York: City of New York, 2004), report written by Jay Shockley, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Information also comes from A.C. David, "Three New Hotels," *Architectural Record* 17 (Mar. 1905), 167-188; William Hutchins, "New York Hotels I," *Architectural Record* 12 (Oct. 1902), 459-471; Hutchins, "New York Hotels II," *Architectural Record* 12 (Nov. 1902), 621-635; and Robert. A.M. Stern et al, *New York 1900, Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism 1890-1915* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 253-272.

<sup>6</sup> This phenomenon continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1923, *Rider's New York* noted that the modern American Hotel was "not merely a hotel, but in a certain sense a public resort, frequented daily by a vast floating population comprised not only of casual strangers, but of resident New Yorkers, who take an unlicensed yet undisputed advantage of a large proportion of the accommodations and privileges intended for the guests of the house. Any well-dressed stranger can enter unchallenged, use the parlors and sitting rooms as meeting places for social or business purposes, finish a day's correspondence on hotel stationery..." *Rider's New York City* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1923), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Hutchins, "New York Hotels II," 621.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> In his 1905 article, A.C. David said there were eight new 10-20 story hotels recently constructed in Manhattan, 167.

<sup>10</sup> "The New Metropolitan Hotels," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, 74 (Sept. 3, 1904), 478.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to travelers, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century another trend became popular, hotels for longer term habitations. This applied to those who maintained other residences outside the city and could not afford or did not desire to maintain a city residence, such as unmarried men, or young childless couples who nonetheless wanted to maintain a high public profile. For these people, hotels filled their needs since they were places where they could live in suites of rooms serviced by the hotel staff (and thus did not require the hiring of a personal staff). This type of hotel first appeared in New York in the 1880s and continued to serve certain New Yorkers. In 1905, A.C. David mentioned that there were then almost 100 such "family hotels . . . in the central part of Manhattan." Many of these also served visitors who came to New York for a week or more and wanted quieter and more private surroundings.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> David, "Three New Hotels" 167-8.

<sup>14</sup> "In the Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, Mar. 14, 1907, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Miller, *Aller Retour New York* (New York: New Directions, 1991), 14.

<sup>16</sup> The Alvord estate actually sold their property, lots 49, 50 and 52 to the New York Realty Company which then sold the combined lot to Dewey. "In the Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1902, 14. Also New York County Register Office Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 99, page 302. Feb. 14, 1902.

<sup>17</sup> "James H. Breslin's New Lease." *New York Times*, Mar 5, 1903, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> *History of Colorado*, Wilbur Fisk Stone, ed., II (Denver: The S.J. Clarke Publ. Co., 1918), accessed online at <http://files.usgarchives.org/co/denver/bios/wolcotth.txt> on 8/8/2011.



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- <sup>19</sup> *Springfield Republican*, Oct. 1, 1890. This was a report of Dewey's arrest in New York for non-payment to E.S. Higgins & Co. who supplied wool for the carpets.
- <sup>20</sup> Office for Metropolitan History, <http://www.metrohistory.com/dbpages/NBresults.lasso>, accessed 10/12/11.
- <sup>21</sup> William and James shared a business address at least from 1900 until 1902.
- <sup>22</sup> "In the Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1902, 14.
- <sup>23</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, Jan. 11, 1905, 11.
- <sup>24</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, Aug. 10, 1908, 7.
- <sup>25</sup> Information about John Duncan comes from "John Hemingway Duncan," *Binghamton and Broome County, New York, A History*, III (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1924), 267; LPC, *Knox Building Designation Report (LP-1091)* (New York: City of New York, 1980), prepared by Marjorie Pearson; LPC, *Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (LP-1051)* (New York: City of New York, 1981), Architects Appendix; LPC, *7 West 54<sup>th</sup> Street House Designation Report (LP- 1102)* (New York: City of New York, 1981), prepared by Rachel Carley; *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1929, 31; *American Art Annual*, 27, 409; *New International Year Book*, 1929, Herbert Treadwell Wade, ed., (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1930), 567.
- <sup>26</sup> New York County Register Office, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 99, p.283, Mar. 21, 1904.
- <sup>27</sup> "In the Real Estate Field," *New York Times*, Mar. 8, 1903, 13.
- <sup>28</sup> "Hotel Men All Mourn Death of 'Jim' Breslin," *New York Times*, Apr. 1, 1906, 11.
- <sup>29</sup> "To Get Steel from Germany," *New York Times*, Jun. 3, 1902, 4.
- <sup>30</sup> "Orders Hotel Sold," *New York Times* Jan. 7, 1905, 1. American Mortgage Co. against William C. Dewey. New York County Register Office Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Dewey to Record Realty Co., Liber 106, p. 156., Feb. 11, 1905.
- <sup>31</sup> New York County Register Office Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Wolcott Realty Co. to Wolcott Operating Corp., William Manger, pres., Liber 3331, p. 213, Feb. 27, 1923.
- <sup>32</sup> New York County Register Office Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Wolcott Operating Corp to Hotel Wolcott, Inc., Hyman Portnof, pres., Liber 3838, p. 336, Oct. 1, 1932.
- <sup>33</sup> "Bank Sells Realty to Hotel Operator," *New York Times*, Nov. 30, 1934, 34.
- <sup>34</sup> "Deals in Manhattan," *New York Times*, Oct. 14, 1932, 37.
- <sup>35</sup> The initial brochure is reproduced on the hotel website, <http://www.wolcott.com/oldbrochure.htm>, accessed 10/12/11.
- <sup>36</sup> *Rider's New York City*, 11.
- <sup>37</sup> Cesar Saerchinger, *International Who's Who in Music and Musical Gazetteer*, 5 (New York: Current Literature Publ. Co., 1918), 3.
- <sup>38</sup> John Kennedy Winkler, *Tobacco Tycoon: The Story of James Buchanan Duke* (New York: Random House, 1942), 171.
- <sup>39</sup> From History section on hotel website, <http://www.wolcott.com/historymain.htm>, accessed 9/22/11.
- <sup>40</sup> Frank Phillip Morse, *Backstage with Henry Miller* (New York: EP Dutton & Co., 1938), 151.
- <sup>41</sup> Leigh Montville, *The Big Bam: The Life and Times of Babe Ruth*, (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 94-95.
- <sup>42</sup> Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgewood to Corning* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2000).
- <sup>43</sup> The last two facts come from the history section of the hotel website: <http://www.wolcott.com/historymain.htm>, accessed 9/22/11.

## 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 Hotel Wolcott has a special character and a 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 the Hotel Wolcott was designed by the prominent architect John H. Duncan in the Beaux Arts style and constructed in 1902-04 in the new mid-town Manhattan hotel district that was developing because of a period of prosperity and growth in New York, in building, entertainment and business; that new forms of transportation led to more travel for business and pleasure, encouraging the construction of new hotels with the latest conveniences; that New York hotels of this period emerged as a new and different type of building (later copied in other cities) used for public and private functions; that the Hotel Wolcott was centrally located near shopping and theater opportunities as well as train stations and lines; that the hotel catered to transients and long-term residents and was the site of numerous events, including Fiorello Laguardia's inaugural ball; that the design of the building, with its classically-inspired elements, its warm brick facade and high mansard roof followed the type of hotel design begun by Henry Hardenbergh on the Waldorf-Astoria and recommended to designers of the period; that Duncan chose to make this building distinctive on its side-street location by the use of over-scaled decorative elements such as cartouches, heads and keystones; that the building is an unusually well-maintained example of this popular type and is a remarkably intact example, fulfilling the same function for which it was designed, more than 100 years ago.

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 Hotel Wolcott, 4 West 31<sup>st</sup> Street (aka 4-10 West 31<sup>st</sup> Street), Manhattan, and designates as its Landmark Site Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 832, Lot 49.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Pablo Vengoechea, Vice-Chair  
Michael Devonshire, Joan Gerner, Christopher Moore,  
Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Hotel Wolcott  
4 West 31 Street (aka 4-10 West 31 Street)  
Manhattan  
Manhattan Tax Map Block 832, Lot 49  
*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011*





Hotel Wolcott  
View from East

*Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011*



Hotel Wolcott  
Ground floor and entrance  
*Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011*







Hotel Wolcott  
Copper and Terra-Cotta Details  
*Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011*





Hotel Wolcott  
Details

*Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011*





**HOTEL WOLCOTT (LP-2423), 4 West 31st Street (aka 4-10 West 31st Street)**  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 832, Lot 49

Designated: December 20, 2011

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 09v1, 2009. Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, J.M. Date: December 20, 2011.