

BARCLAY-VESEY BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR consisting of the West Street entrance vestibule, the Washington Street 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, 140 West Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1923-1927; Ralph Walker of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 84, Lot 1.

On September 19, 1989, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Barclay-Vesey Building Interior consisting of the West Street entrance vestibule, the Washington Street 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, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 32). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The Commission received one letter in support of designation. At the public hearing, a representative of the owner indicated that the owner was unsure of its position. Subsequently, the owner indicated it would not oppose designation.

Summary

The first floor interior of the Barclay-Vesey Building of the New York Telephone Company (also known as the New York Telephone Building), is an integral component of the first major work of prominent New York architect Ralph Walker. The dramatic interior of "the largest telephone company building in the world,"¹ is substantially intact and presents a striking display of rich materials. The space takes the form of a long corridor between two entrance vestibules with transverse alcoves for elevator banks and pay telephone booths. (Fig. 1) The headquarters building, built in 1923-27, was envisioned by the company's president, Howard F. Thurber, as a corporate symbol -- a grand statement of the New York Telephone Company's size, strength, and success. Walker's design for the building was undertaken at a time of great progress and transition in American architecture, and was a product of the atmosphere of architectural creativity and originality which flourished in New York in the 1920s. Walker intended the design of the building to be completely modern in every feature and detail, including the materials, style, and unconventional ornament found on the interior. He created and carried out a critically acclaimed ornamental program which illustrates important technological advancements in the field of communications, recalls the history of the building's site, and reinforces the vertical emphasis of the overall design. This ornamental program is a particularly striking element of a design that stands as a prototypical example of the American Art Deco style. A further expression of the lobby's modernity is the role it plays in establishing continuity between interior and exterior design. Walker's successful design for the Barclay-Vesey Building led contemporary critics to judge the work as an emphatic statement of modern architectural trends and to call the interior space the "greatest triumph" of the building.²

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Site History

The block bounded by Barclay and Vesey Streets at the north and south and Washington and West Streets at the east and west was originally located beyond the present shoreline of the Hudson River. (Fig. 2) The waterfront along the west side of Manhattan was developed beginning early in the nineteenth century. As part of the improvement, the banks of the Hudson were filled in, extended, and raised, and piers were constructed at the western end of every street between Vesey and King Streets by the late 1830s.³ Crucial to the city's mercantile expansion, the improvements helped New York City to achieve recognition as the country's major port and trading center by the 1830s and 1840s. This area and the section of the city just to the north, now known as Tribeca, were transformed into a center for dairy goods, produce, and less perishable goods including tobacco, imported woods, coffee, and spices. Markets for these items were developed in the area close to the docks to facilitate the handling of the commodities. First established in 1812 and repeatedly expanded, the Washington Market, located on the block bounded by West, Washington, Vesey, and Fulton Streets, just south of the Barclay-Vesey Building, grew to be Manhattan's major wholesale and retail produce outlet.⁴ Many other buildings were constructed in the area to accommodate the food industry, including approximately thirty-five three-, four-, and five-story brick buildings on the site chosen for the telephone company's headquarters. The activities of the merchants, so important to the site and to the surrounding area, would later be recalled in the ornamental program of the Barclay-Vesey Building. The site was chosen over more popular office locations to the east on Broadway because it was much less expensive. The West Street frontage was considered an asset because it was assumed that the structures along the docks would never rise above two or three stories and the future building's western exposure would, therefore, always remain unobstructed.

The New York Telephone Company

The telephone business developed rapidly following the early successes of Alexander Graham

Bell's inventions in the 1870s. By the turn of the century the American Telephone & Telegraph Company had become the central institution of Bell Telephone Company operations, with smaller companies, including the New York Telephone Company, conducting its regional services.

After a sluggish period of business during World War I the New York Telephone Company faced a new period of rapid expansion. In an effort to organize and control the growth, the company decided to establish divisional headquarters throughout the state. A reassessment of the company's organization in New York City concluded that its personnel, offices, and equipment were inefficiently scattered city-wide. Howard Ford Thurber (1869-1928), president of the New York Telephone Company from 1919 to 1924, determined that a new central headquarters building would alleviate the problems associated with the company's lack of unity. Thurber's "vision," as it was called in his *New York Times* obituary, was to create a building large enough to "satisfy the [company's] present demands and to reasonably anticipate future requirements."⁵ The new headquarters building would consolidate an equipment and administrative center, incorporating six central offices. As explained in a Telephone Company pamphlet, central offices

are the nerve centers of the [telephone] system. Here the wires from the local telephones and from other central offices converge and are carried to distributing frames, where they fan out to the proper points of contact on the switchboards.⁶

Thurber's building program required a large utilitarian facility with specialized mechanical features and space for a centralized work force of 6,000 employees serving 120,000 telephones. Undaunted by the numerous details of the project, Thurber envisioned not just the practical concerns of the building but its potential symbolic quality as well. A large structure, progressively designed, could establish a positive corporate image and symbolize the size and strength of the organization -- an industry whose work was clearly at the forefront of modern technology. With Thurber's plan for a new headquarters building, the New York Telephone Company was established at the vanguard of modern trends in business and architecture.

Ralph Walker and McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin

For the design of its headquarters building, the New York Telephone Company chose McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, an architectural firm whose long history with the telephone company began in 1885 with the firm's founding partner Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz (1853-1921). Eidlitz was commissioned by the Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company, the predecessor of the New York Telephone Company, in that year to design its first headquarters building at 18 Cortlandt Street in Manhattan.⁷ Andrew McKenzie (1861-1926), born in Dunkirk, New York, and educated in Buffalo, came to New York City in 1884 and worked for the firm of Babb, Cook & Willard. He became associated with Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz in 1902 and the partnership of Eidlitz & McKenzie was active from 1905 to 1909. That firm's major work was the New York Times Building at Times Square.⁸ Stephen Voorhees (1879-1965) was born near Rocky Hill, New Jersey, and was educated as a civil engineer at Princeton University, graduating in 1900. In 1902 he began to practice with Eidlitz & McKenzie as an engineer and superintendent of construction; one of his first jobs was the supervision of the foundation work for the New York Times Building. 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 Andrew McKenzie.

In 1910 the firm of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin was organized and continued Eidlitz's successful relationship with the telephone company, gaining numerous commissions for buildings throughout New York state. By 1912 the firm had completed approximately thirty new telephone buildings in New York City alone (not including alterations and additions).⁹ The firm also designed the Brooklyn Edison Company Building and the Brooklyn Municipal Building, as well as private residences. McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin was active through 1925.

In 1919 Ralph Walker (1889-1973) joined the office of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin. Born in Waterbury, Connecticut, Walker began a two-year apprenticeship with the Providence, Rhode Island, architectural firm of Hilton & Jackson in 1907 and then studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In Montreal in 1911

Walker studied 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. (His two-year trip to Italy was postponed by the war, during which he served in France with the Army Corps of Engineers.) Walker also 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.¹⁰ The appearance of the building, unlike anything previously produced by the firm, and the general success of the design, established Walker's reputation. Near the completion of the building and following the death of McKenzie, Walker rose to partnership in the firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. Considered the firm's main designer, Walker continued to produce designs for the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, becoming a specialist in the design of that industry's buildings. Subsequent commissions whose designs were based on ideas first developed at the Barclay-Vesey Building were the New Jersey Bell Headquarters (Newark, 1928-29), the Western Union Building at 60 Hudson Street (1928-30), and telephone buildings in Syracuse and Rochester. The Irving Trust Company Building at 1 Wall Street (1929-31) and the New York Telephone Building at 32 Sixth Avenue (1930-32) followed soon after. (The Western Union Building and the New York Telephone Building are designated New York City Landmarks.) Walker also designed buildings for other corporate clients including General Foods and IBM, and several pavilions for firms at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. The success of Walker's corporate commissions brought him recognition as one of the city's most prominent designers of Art Deco skyscrapers.

Active in professional circles, Walker was president of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects from 1933 to 1935, president of the Architectural League from 1937 to 1939, and president of the national organization of the American Institute of Architects from 1949 to 1951. 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 in the

capacity of a consultant. He later served on the Fine Arts Commission (appointed in 1959 by President Eisenhower), as president of the Municipal Art Society, and as editor of *Pencil Points*. His firm continued in various forms after his retirement and is today known as Haines, Lundberg & Waehler.

Contemporary Trends in Architecture

The 1916 Building Zone Resolution had a tremendous impact on architecture in New York City; the final form and appearance of the Barclay-Vesey Building owe much to this law. Increased building heights and the subsequent decrease in the amount of sunlight at street level were factors which created the need for the ordinance. The restrictions created to bring about the "more beautiful city," as stated in the *Building Zone Handbook*,¹¹ were based on the use of calculated building setbacks to control height and bulk. The building shape that resulted from the zoning requirements took the form of a ziggurat (a rhythmic succession of blocks which grew smaller and more recessed from bottom to top) that was topped by a tower or a pair of towers.

Architects drew inspiration from the building forms which resulted from the 1916 zoning resolution. In 1922, architect and critic Harvey Wiley Corbett (1873-1954) and architectural renderer Hugh Ferriss (1889-1962) explored the possibilities of the zoning law in a series of drawings, first published in *Pencil Points* (1923), which illustrated progressive stages of design based on the law's restrictions. The drawings and the laws from which they came directed the architects' attention to the building as a whole rather than to a single element of the structure, such as the facade, thus altering the whole design process. A result of this trend toward total building design was a new awareness of the interior as an integral part of the overall design.

The zoning law provided architects with a sound, rational basis for the form and appearance of the skyscraper as well as a new source of creativity; historical styles could not express this modern sensibility and, consequently, a new "skyscraper style" emerged in the 1920s. Walker noted, "At present it is the skyscraper that is pointing the way, that is showing the possibilities of creating a style more nearly expressive of our time"¹² Major characteristics of the new style were sculpted massing and bold setbacks,

vertical emphasis, and ornament subordinated to the overall mass. Clearly reflecting the current interest of the designers, the new style was commonly called "Modernistic" or "Modern Perpendicular." Corbett praised the new "setback style" and predicted it would "go down in history along with the Gothic, the Classic, and the Renaissance."¹³

The Modernistic style generated additional interest as architects identified it as a distinctively American style.¹⁴ American businesses capitalized on the status achieved by the modern skyscraper. Increasingly, large corporations chose the skyscraper as the home for their operations, believing a massive skyscraper with dramatic public interiors in a modern style could symbolize their success and progressiveness and could project a positive image for their company. The Chicago Tribune Company capitalized on the concept of the skyscraper as corporate image in its widely-publicized and much-entered architectural competition of 1922 for the "most beautiful skyscraper in the world" to house its new headquarters. Walker's entry for this competition, which won an award of Honorable Mention, is another example of his experimentation with the Modernistic style and its vertical expression and set-back tower forms.

Design of the Barclay-Vesey Building and its First-Floor Lobby

Walker's Design Theory. Walker treated the first floor lobby of the Barclay-Vesey Building as an integral component of his overall design, following the same principles in the interior that he utilized on the exterior. This can be seen as part of the trend toward total building design which was gaining popularity at the time. Still, Walker's execution of a dramatic continuity between interior and exterior design was unusual; many contemporary buildings which appeared modern on the exterior still reverted to historical styles on the interior. Walker achieved this continuity in the Barclay-Vesey Building by carrying the spirit and character of the overall form of the building, as well as by extending the program of the exterior ornament to the interior. By doing this, he was able to create a dramatic public space which complements the overall building design and which gives "pleasant relief from the labors of the day."¹⁵

After unsatisfactory attempts to adapt traditional styles to the Barclay-Vesey Building, Walker proceeded to make an "honest attempt... to treat the problem for its own sake, to make [the building] as modern in conception as the telephone activity it houses."¹⁶ Thus, Walker aligned himself with other architects of the period who began to focus on the importance of modern technology and its role in the expression of the new Modernistic style. As a result, the design of the Barclay-Vesey Building is based in part on the theory that only through machine technology can a modern style develop.¹⁷ As Corbett summarized the trend, "The modern architect... must learn to use the machine as a basis of design if his work is to be indigenous to this period."¹⁸ Walker even conceived of his building "as a machine which had definite functions to perform for the benefit of its occupants."¹⁹

Walker's theories found physical form in the Barclay-Vesey Building lobby where he attempted to eliminate handwork from the construction of the building, choosing materials which utilized machine technology whenever possible. For example, stone was used as a veneer on wall surfaces so that pieces could be cut by machine, rather than by hand. The fluted marble pilasters were machine-cut, as well, and the plaster friezes, bronze grilles, and other bronze detailing display repetitive ornamental patterns reminiscent of machine processing. The use of these high quality materials created a sense of strength and refinement consistent with the corporate image the company wished to convey.

A further reference to the machine in the Barclay-Vesey Building is the symbolic expression of modern technology found in the lobby which takes the form of painted ceiling panels and bronze floor plaques (all described below) depicting specific events or aspects of communication and signifying the ultimate triumph of this modern industry. The ornament is especially distinctive because it relates the purpose of the building -- housing the telephone company -- to the history of communication through the ages. This glorification of technological advancements was a popular ornamental theme in Walker's buildings for the telephone company and can be found in many subsequent lobby designs.

The emphasis on verticality, expressed on the exterior by brick piers, is also a major design element of the lobby. Regularly spaced fluted

pilasters of bold-colored marble establish the vertical emphasis. The gentle curve of the vaulted ceiling and its ribs (which connect the pilasters across the lobby) continue the sensation of upward movement. The blurring of the division between wall and ceiling was an attempt to convey a sense of spaciousness and to avoid oppressiveness. To downplay horizontality in the design, there are no projecting moldings and surfaces remain flat wherever possible, thus strengthening the vertical emphasis of the design. On a smaller scale, the ornamental motifs of the grilles, elevators, door frames, and other details are based on vertical vine patterns. The lobby's chandeliers, miniature versions of setback skyscrapers, display a vertical orientation as well, and serve as another direct correlation between interior and exterior design.

The continuity between interior and exterior design in the Barclay-Vesey Building was praised by Lewis Mumford who saw it as a perpetuation of the work of H.H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright²⁰ and credited Walker as the first architect since Sullivan to carry through a significant scheme of decoration.²¹ In fact, many aspects of Walker's ornament -- the textural quality, the complicated all-over patterning, the non-historicist subject matter, the combination of naturalistic and geometric elements, and the synthesis of flowing ornament with geometric building forms -- were used by Sullivan and came to be seen as hallmarks of his style. Buildings such as the Carson Pirie Scott Department Store (Chicago, 1899-1904) and the Transportation Building at the World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago, 1893) clearly illustrate Sullivan's earlier use of these techniques.

The Ornamental Program. For Walker, ornamental embellishment was needed to add texture and interest in a large structure, to engage the passerby, and to reduce the scale to a more human level. The ornament of the Barclay-Vesey Building lobby accomplishes these goals in two ways, the most striking of which is a didactic display of painted ceiling panels. The sequential story of the panels serves to engross the viewer and relate the technological advances in communication through the ages and the place of the New York Telephone Company in these advances. The iconographic program of the lobby clearly symbolizes the triumph of modern communication. The use of grapes and grapevines in the ornament throughout the lobby can be seen

as a representation of communication. In addition, an occasional bell, the company symbol, is found in these surfaces.

Walker also attempted to express modernity in the bold and original treatment of other surfaces with stylized ornament. As a surface treatment, Walker believed ornament should be "so complicated in its structure as not to be readily comprehended; its framework should be as hidden as the steel structure itself. It should repay repeated interest and study . . ."22 As to the actual content of the ornament, he believed that overly-used traditional motifs, such as the egg and dart, had lost all significance to the modern viewer and he attempted to express the modernity of the telephone industry by casting aside traditional forms. The ornament executed in the interior lobby of the Barclay-Vesey Building met all of Walker's standards concerning texture, complexity, and unconventionalism. Called "straightforward and appropriate and eminently right,"23 the ornament has no basis in historic architectural styles; instead it recalls the history and traditions of the site and surrounding area. Fruits, vegetables, vines with leaves, marine life, birds, small animals, and other natural objects populate the ornamented surfaces and recall the nearby Hudson River and the market area which earlier occupied the site.

Walker called his ornament "free and flowing,"24 a description which in many ways contradicts the strict rigidity of his overall design. However, the blending of complicated ornament with simple forms, naturalistic elements with geometric shapes, and massing with small details stands as one of Walker's major triumphs. The synthesis of these elements allows the Barclay-Vesey Building to be admired both from a distance and from a closer perspective, both inside and out.

The Stylistic Context of the Barclay-Vesey Building. The design of the lobby of the Barclay-Vesey Building -- its materials, its emphasis on verticality, and its flattened, non-historicist ornamental program -- can be seen as a prototypical example of what came to be known as the American Art Deco style. The Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels in Paris, which opened in 1925 after much of the design of the Barclay-Vesey Building had been completed, disseminated many of these elements which had been pioneered by Walker: abstracted natural and

geometric ornament in all-over patterns, linear and vertical emphasis in design, streamlined forms, and dramatic juxtaposition of colors and textures of materials. These elements were used by numerous American architects for subsequent set-back skyscraper designs. Reaching its zenith between 1928 and 1931 in New York City, this new architectural style was called "Modernistic" in contemporary sources. By the time of its critical re-assessment in the 1960s and '70s the style had achieved the popular name of Art Deco.²⁵ Taking into account the source of the term Art Deco and the timing of the design, it is accurate to call the style of the Barclay-Vesey Building "Modernistic." "Modern Perpendicular," another contemporary stylistic term, calls attention to the vertical emphasis of the design. Walker clearly stated his view of the building's style and its origin:

It was Emerson, I think, who told us to stop building the sepulchers of our fathers and build our own house. The Barclay-Vesey building is an attempt to build a house of today. A house that is not Greek or Gothic, or Mayan; that looks little to the past, much to the present, and tries to glimpse the future.²⁶

Contemporary Reactions

The Barclay-Vesey Building was hailed in its day as the ultimate modern skyscraper. Critics commented on all aspects of its design and construction. The Telephone Company was pleased with the result of its new headquarters building, calling it "a symbol of service and progress" and a "graphic example of [the] movement in modern telephony."²⁷ In addition, the building became a model for subsequent telephone headquarters throughout New York. The wide acceptance of the building as a symbol of modern architecture was confirmed when its photograph was used as a frontispiece in the English translation of Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*. The Architectural League of New York awarded the building its Gold Medal of Honor in 1927. Joseph Pennell, an etcher struck by New York's skyscrapers, proclaimed it "the most impressive modern building in the world."²⁸ Another account pinpointed the interior calling it the "greatest triumph of the building."²⁹ Talbot

Hamlin anticipated a prominent place in architectural history for the structure: "The whole building is destined to be a monument of American progress in architecture."³⁰ Still other accounts commented on the elusive qualities of the design, citing the ability of its "rugged beauty" to "hold one breathless with its force."³¹ Mumford commended its thorough design, calling it "one of the few skyscrapers that [could] bear close inspection."³² Corbett agreed:

The Telephone Building is worth the careful study of every modern architect, and should receive the admiration of every layman. Let it be hoped that it stands at the dawn of a new day, both for architects that sin, and the public that is sinned against.³³

Construction³⁴

Several artists participated in the execution of the interior design of the Barclay-Vesey Building. Much of the interior ornament was carried out by sculptors Ulysses Ricci (1888-1960) and John DeCesare. Born in New York, Ricci studied at Cooper Union, the Art Students League, and with James Earl Fraser. He designed medals for the American Numismatic Society and executed sculptural work for many buildings in New York, including the Bowery Savings Bank and a series of bronze plaques for the Times Square Schrafft's restaurant. For a time he was a member of the firm Ricci & Zari. John DeCesare was a member of the National Sculpture Society and for a time was a member of the firm Stifter & DeCesare.

Interior color decorations for the building were carried out by Edgar Williams and the firm of Mack, Jenney & Tyler.³⁵ Edgar Williams (1884-1974) studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at the American Academy in Rome. He established an architectural practice in New York in 1912 and also worked in Boston. Williams, known for his draftsmanship, taught at MIT and was the consulting architect for the New York Public Library. The firm of Mack, Jenney & Tyler was composed of Frank[?] Mack, Edgar Whitfield Jenney (1869-?), and Ernest Franklin Tyler (1879-1951). Jenney was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and worked as a painter and lithographer. In New York City he worked on the Standard Oil Building and the Equitable Insurance Building. Tyler was born in New Haven, Connecticut, and studied at Yale, Columbia, and in Paris. He worked as a decorator, portrait painter,

and architect, his decorative works including interiors of the Columbia University dining hall, the Morgan Library Annex, the Woolworth Building, and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Mack, Jenney & Tyler dissolved in 1941, having worked on the Wisconsin State Capitol, the Houses of Parliament in Ottawa, the Widener Art Gallery in Philadelphia, Woolsey Hall at Yale University, and the U.S. Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C.

Demolition of the existing buildings on the site of the Barclay-Vesey Building was begun on May 23, 1923, and was completed on July 14. Foundation work was begun on June 20, 1923. The first ten floors of the structure were allocated to central office use (although it would take several years for all the necessary equipment to be moved and installed). The upper floors were allocated to administrative use, with the twenty-ninth floor reserved for executive offices. Mechanical space, consisting mainly of the elevator banks (the northeast elevator bank rises the full height of the tower), was held to the central core of the structure, as was the space for the central operating system which benefitted from artificial light. On the first floor, the main corridor bisects the core. On the upper floors, traditional office space surrounds the core and receives natural light.

The final rivet was placed in the Barclay-Vesey Building by telephone company president J.S. McCulloh; Thurber by that time had assumed the position of chairman of the board. The last brick and stone were placed by tradesmen elected by their co-workers. On February 19, 1926, the first occupants entered the building, beginning what was referred to as "the longest moving day in New York's history."³⁶ Contemporary accounts indicate that the building was completed on June 30, 1926, but the Department of Buildings did not sign off on the work until April 8, 1927.

Description

The first floor interior of the Barclay-Vesey Building consists of a vaulted corridor approximately twenty-two feet high, extending east to west between the Washington Street and the West Street entrance vestibules. (Figs. 1,3) Opening off the main corridor are four elevator alcoves, two on the north, two on the south. An alcove with public telephones opens off the north wall as well. Doors admitting entrance to offices and stairwells are found along the corridor walls. (The offices and stairwells are not part of this designation.)

Much of the decorative ornament of the lobby consists of intertwining vines sprouting leaves, flowers, and grapes. Scattered throughout the interlaces are cherubs, human figures, and a variety of animals and other creatures including fish, mice, birds, squirrels, and snakes. While some specific patterns may be repeated, numerous variations on the intertwining vine theme are found throughout the lobby's ornamental program. Rather than describe in detail all variations represented, particular architectural elements will be cited as using the intertwining vine pattern and it will be understood that the pattern may contain any combination of the figures mentioned above. Especially significant or unusual features will be addressed.

The floor of the corridor and elevator alcoves is of a buff-colored travertine with black travertine detailing in geometric shapes. Near the middle of the corridor are set two bronze medallions. (Fig. 4) The eastern medallion depicts a woman surrounded by skyscrapers, telephone poles and wires, water and mountains, all enclosed in a border filled with an intertwining vine pattern. The scene represents the female telephone operator and her central office duties. The plaque to the west depicts a man with similar surrounding features and represents the telephone lineman and his activities in the field. The pair of plaques, currently roped off to prevent further wear of the detailing, depicts the cooperation between home office and field.

The walls of the corridor and elevator alcoves are faced with buff-colored travertine which matches the floor. The base of the walls and the fluted pilasters found at intervals along the length of the corridor are of a richly-colored dark green Levanto marble with black veins. The plaster wall frieze of the corridor, painted to resemble bronze, displays an intertwining vine pattern topped by a geometric band. (Fig. 5) The surface of the corridor walls between the elevator lobbies is faced with Levanto marble. (Fig. 6) At the center of this surface on the northern wall is placed a clock whose numbers encircle a ring of maidens dancing in a clockwise direction. Below the clock is a commemorative plaque; at the floor is a marble-based planter. Opposite the clock, on the south corridor wall between the elevator banks, hang two plaques and two flags.

Doorways which open onto the main corridor are framed in Levanto marble. The door frames

are articulated by a series of bronze triangles and diamonds. All doors are bronze. Double doors, found on the south wall of the corridor at the easternmost and westernmost openings, are recessed from the surface of the corridor wall. The recesses are faced with marble and a bronze transom is found above each pair of doors. Bronze heating/ventilating grilles are placed just above the marble base of the walls at intervals along the corridor. The grilles display a vertically-oriented pattern of vines with leaves and flowers. (Fig. 7)

The vaulted ceiling of the corridor is a significant component of the interior design. (Fig. 8) Along its length are twelve hand-painted murals with gold leaf accents depicting various stages in the development of human communication.³⁷ The scenes are separated by dropped paneled ribs whose sides are perforated as part of the ventilation system. Drawn through by fans as part of a special heating system, the air is heated, then sent out closer to the floor.³⁸ The painted panels were meant to be read from either direction of entry toward the center. From the west are depicted: 1) West Africans using drums to transmit signals to nearby villages, 2) carrier pigeons sent by Chinese merchants, 3) ancient Greeks sending messages by reflecting sunlight off their shields, and 4) ancient Romans communicating by fire; a message is sent from a tower of the old Roman wall in Britain. (Fig. 9) From the east are depicted: 1) a megaphone used by early Egyptians, 2) smoke signals sent by American Indians, 3) an Aztec runner carrying a message by foot, 4) medieval knights conveying messages by signal flags, and 5) signalling by gunfire, depicted by a cannon on a wooden ship. Each scene is bound in a painted, square border. The outer border consists of a painted intertwining vine pattern. A series of recessed lights alternating with small, painted panels depicting trees with roots, flowers, and leaves, separates the murals from the side walls of the corridor. The edge of each oval-shaped lamp recess is trimmed with a bronze geometric pattern and the lamp base has foliate detailing. (Fig. 5)

The central set of three painted ceiling panels symbolizes the success of modern communication. (Fig. 10) In the center of the middle panel is a depiction of a telephone backed by the sun. The shafts of light and intertwining wires which radiate from the middle to the side panels symbolize the linking of the telephone, telegraph, and radio and

the ability to communicate with anyone, anywhere, by telephone. The east side panel contains the "signature" of Hugo R.B. Newman, a New York City painter.³⁹ The painted edge panels combine an intertwining vine pattern with geometric elements. From the upheld arms of angelic figures in the two side panels drop elaborate bronze chandeliers.⁴⁰ Placed directly over the bronze floor medallions, they mark the cross axes of the elevator lobbies. (Fig. 11) The design of the chandeliers was intended to represent the vertical and setback features of the overall building form. Light and sound equipment has been installed among the rods which connect the chandeliers to the ceiling.

There are twenty-four passenger elevators in four transverse alcoves located near the mid-point of the corridor. The southern alcoves have four elevators each; northern alcoves have eight elevators each. The openings leading to these alcoves receive special detailing; the marble surface of each reveal is trimmed with decorative bronze panels and corner detailing. (Fig. 12)

The walls of the elevator alcoves are faced with travertine and have no pilasters. (Fig. 13) The elevator doors leading to "the grand staircase of the skyscraper"⁴¹ are of hammered iron and display a central stem from which smaller stems and flowers extend. (Fig. 12) Birds and squirrels rest amid the foliage. The elevator door openings are trimmed in bronze detailed with intertwining vines and flowers.

The ceilings of the small southern alcoves have a series of dropped and receding panels. The dropped panels are painted with an intertwining vine pattern in shades of green, tan, and burgundy. At the end of each recessed panel, which is painted blue, is found a light fixture in a triangular recess. (Additional fixtures are recessed in the painted end panels.) The rear walls of the elevator alcoves are each punctuated by a bronze door with a transom. Grilles are found on the side walls of the southern elevator alcoves and a fire command station desk has been placed in the entrance to the eastern alcove.

The larger elevator alcoves off the northern corridor wall each have a ceiling similar to those at the south over the six elevator doors nearest the corridor. (Fig. 13) The ceiling above the other two elevators is slightly lower than the main ceiling. Its flat surface has a square panel painted blue and burgundy and a central light fixture. The rear walls of these elevator alcoves are also punctuated

by bronze doors with transoms. Bronze grilles flank these doors. On the eastern wall of the large eastern elevator alcove is a bronze mailbox with elaborate carved detail.

A telephone alcove opens off the north wall of the corridor to the east of the large elevator alcoves. The floor and walls of the alcove are of travertine. The ceiling is less elaborate than that of the elevator alcoves. Dropped ceiling panels are painted with an intertwining vine pattern and a light fixture is hung from a central location. Along the western wall of the alcove are installed telephone booths; along the eastern wall are installed display cases. A low planter is placed against the back wall.

The east and west entrances of the Barclay-Vesey Building each receive an elaborate amount of ornament and detail. (Fig. 8) A pair of revolving doors is flanked by a pair of double doors. Vertical members of the bronze door frames are detailed with an intertwining vine pattern and geometric ornament. The horizontal members above the doors are ornamented with starfish, snails, squirrels, and geometric patterns. A large window fills the space between the doors and the arch of the ceiling. The elaborate bronze screen of intertwining vines and grapes at the exterior is visible through the colored glass.

In the late 1980s new sets of metal and glass doors were installed just inside the original entry doors at both vestibules. Extending across the width of the corridor, they create a weather-lock. The ceiling of each new structure meets the original door frame just above the ornamented frieze, hiding the cornice. Also in the late 1980s, a card security system consisting of a series of turnstiles was installed inside the new set of doors at the eastern entrance. The West Street entrance is currently used only for emergency purposes.

Subsequent History

Apart from a few minor changes, the lobby of the Barclay-Vesey Building remains remarkably intact. The building continues to be used by the New York Telephone Company.

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*Report edited by Elisa Urbanelli,
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NOTES

1. The New York Telephone Company, "The Site," *Telephone Review* (Sept., 1926), 326.
2. Lewis Mumford, "The Barclay-Vesey Building," *New Republic* 51 (July 6, 1927) 176-77.
3. Ann C. Bittenwieser, *Manhattan Water-bound* (New York, 1987), 39-40.
4. The market survived until it and the surrounding buildings were demolished in the late 1960s. The site is now occupied by the World Trade Center.
5. Born in Brooklyn, Thurber began his life-long career in the telephone business in 1890 as an assistant engineer for the Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company in New York. He rose to the position of general superintendent in that company from 1894 to 1906, then transferred to the New York Telephone Company as general manager. "Howard F. Thurber," *Who Was Who in America*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1968), 1238. See also: Howard F. Thurber obituary, *New York Times*, Apr. 22, 1928, p.31; New York Telephone Company, "The New Telephone Building at 140 West Street," *Telephone Review* (Sept., 1926), 321.
6. New York Telephone Company, "The World Behind Your Telephone," (New York, 1936), 29-30.
7. Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz was the son of the prominent nineteenth-century New York architect Leopold Eidlitz, and established his business in New York in 1876. In Paul Gmelin's obituary, it was reported that the 1885 telephone building was designed by McKenzie and Gmelin for a competition. *Herald Tribune*, Nov. 21, 1937, p.80.
8. The New York Times Building still stands, although its exterior cladding was destroyed in a remodeling of 1965.
9. Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines. *Telephone Buildings Since 1885*, 39-45.
10. When awarded the Medal of Honor of the Architectural League of New York, McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin attributed the work to Walker. Walker cited David C. Comstock, Oliver Razor, Joseph Ballantyne, Chauncey Pierpoint, and John Baker as designers in the firm who assisted in the project.
11. Quoted in: Carol Willis, "Zoning and Zeitgeist: The Skyscraper City in the 1920s," *JSAH* 45 (Mar., 1986), 47.
12. Walker, *Ralph Wakler -- Architect* (New York, 1957), 21.
13. Willis, 55, 57. (Quoted from "The Coming City of Setback Skyscrapers," *New York Times*, Apr. 29, 1923, sec.4, p.5.)
14. Walker also identified with the American quality of modern architecture, saying, "Throughout this great structure . . . the spirit of the design is of this day and of America. It is a new thought in architecture and stands a monument to the peculiar enterprise, straight forwardness and sane thinking that is American." Walker, "A New Architecture," *Telephone Review* (Sept., 1926), 225.
15. Walker, "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building," *American Architect* 130 (Nov. 5, 1926), 399.
16. *Ibid.*, 391.

17. This theory did not completely rule out hand craftsmanship. Walker believed that a combination of machine production and handwork could truthfully express modern architecture. Walker, "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building," *American Architect*, 397.
18. Corbett, "New Heights in American Architecture," *Yale Review* (1928), 696.
19. Walker, "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building," *American Architect*, 397.
20. It is interesting to note that Wright called Walker "the only other architect in America." *New York Times* Jan. 18, 1973.
21. Mumford, 176-77.
22. Walker, "The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building," 398; "A New Architecture," 324.
23. Corbett, "Editorial Comment," *The American Architect* 130 (Nov. 20, 1926), 401.
24. Walker, "A New Architecture," 323.
25. Other terms referring to this or related styles include Art Moderne, Jazz Modern, Zig Zag Modern, the Twenties or the Thirties Style, and Streamlined Modern. Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York, 1975), 41.
26. Walker, *Ralph Walker -- Architect*, 28.
27. "The World Behind Your Telephone," 10-11; "The New Telephone Building at 140 West Street," 321.
28. "The New Telephone Building at 140 West Street," 322.
29. Mumford, 176-77.
30. Robert A.M. Stern, et al., *New York 1930* (New York, 1987), 565.
31. "The Barclay-Vesey Building," *Architectural Record* 61 (Apr., 1927), 301.
32. While Lewis Mumford generally praised the building, he believed there was one major flaw in the design, saying "the Barclay-Vesey Building is about as good as an architect can do today -- business permitting." His main problem with the design arose from the shape of the site and the transition between the base and the tower. The transition was too abrupt for his taste and the skewed juncture between the parts was to him an "annoying defect." However, he called the ceiling murals "wishy washy." Mumford, 176-77.
33. Corbett, "Editorial Comment," 401.
34. Construction of the Barclay-Vesey Building was completed under New Buildings application 312-1923. NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 84, Lot 1. For more information on the construction of the building see New York Telephone Company, "Foundations," and "The Excavation," *Telephone Review* (Sept., 1926), 329, 414. The General Contractor for the project was Marc Eidlitz & Son, Inc. Consulting engineers included Moran, Maurice & Proctor; Meyer, Strong & Jones; Todd, Robertson & Todd; and H.G. Balcom. The New York Telephone Company, "The New Telephone Building at 140 West Street," 322.
35. One of the ceiling panels is signed by Hugo R.B. Newman but credit is usually given to those artists just listed.

36. "Telephone Moving Day," *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1926, p.13.
37. This descriptive information is adapted from The New York Telephone Company, "Blazing the Trails of Communication," *Telephone Review* (Sept., 1926), 338-39.
38. The New York Telephone Company, "Ventilation," *Telephone Review* (Sept., 1926), 336.
39. The signature is executed in block letters. See note 33.
40. The companies which provided light fixtures for the Barclay-Vesey Building were: The Edward F. Caldwell Company, The Sterling Bronze Company, and The Cassidy Company.
41. Walker, "A New Architecture," 325.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Barclay-Vesey Building, First Floor Plan. Shading shows area not designated. (Drawing adapted from plan shown in *Ralph Walker -- Architect*, 28.)
2. The Barclay-Vesey Building, 140 West Street, Block 84, Lot 1, Landmark Site. (Graphic Source: Sanborn, *Manhattan Land Book*, 1988-89.)
3. First floor interior, looking east. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
4. View of bronze floor plaque. (*The American Architect*, Nov. 20, 1926, 409.)
5. Detail of bronze wall frieze with recessed ceiling lights. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
6. Detail of northern corridor wall showing area between elevator alcoves. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
7. Typical bronze grille found in main corridor. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
8. View of corridor, looking west. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
9. Painted ceiling panel depicting Romans communicating by fire. This is the fourth panel from the western entrance. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
10. Central painted ceiling panel, part of a group of three, representing the linking of the telephone, telegraph, and radio. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
11. Bronze chandelier. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
12. View showing elevator doors. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)
13. North wall elevator alcove. The smaller southern elevator alcoves do not include the back area with the dropped ceiling. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster, LPC, 1991.)

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 Barclay-Vesey Building, First Floor Interior, consisting of the West Street entrance vestibule, the Washington Street 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, has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as a 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 first floor interior of the Barclay-Vesey Building, remarkably intact, is an integral component of the first major work of prominent New York City architect Ralph Walker; that the structure, commissioned by the New York Telephone Company and built in 1923-37, was promoted as the world's largest telephone building; that, called Modernistic at the time of its construction, the building is a prototypical example of a skyscraper designed in the American Art Deco style; that Walker's intention that the building be completely modern in every aspect of its design was a response to contemporary trends in New York architectural circles and is seen in the lobby's striking display of rich materials, style, and unconventional ornament and in Walker's ability to successfully establish a continuity between interior and exterior design; that Walker created and carried out a critically acclaimed ornamental program which illustrates important technological advances in the field of communications, recalls the history of the building's site, and reinforces the vertical emphasis of the overall design; that the modern design of the lobby helped to symbolize the success and progressiveness of the New York Telephone Company; and that, at the time of its construction the interior was proclaimed the greatest triumph of a building heralded as a monument to American architecture.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534, 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 Barclay-Vesey Building, First Floor Interior, consisting of the West Street entrance vestibule, the Washington Street 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; 140 West Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 84, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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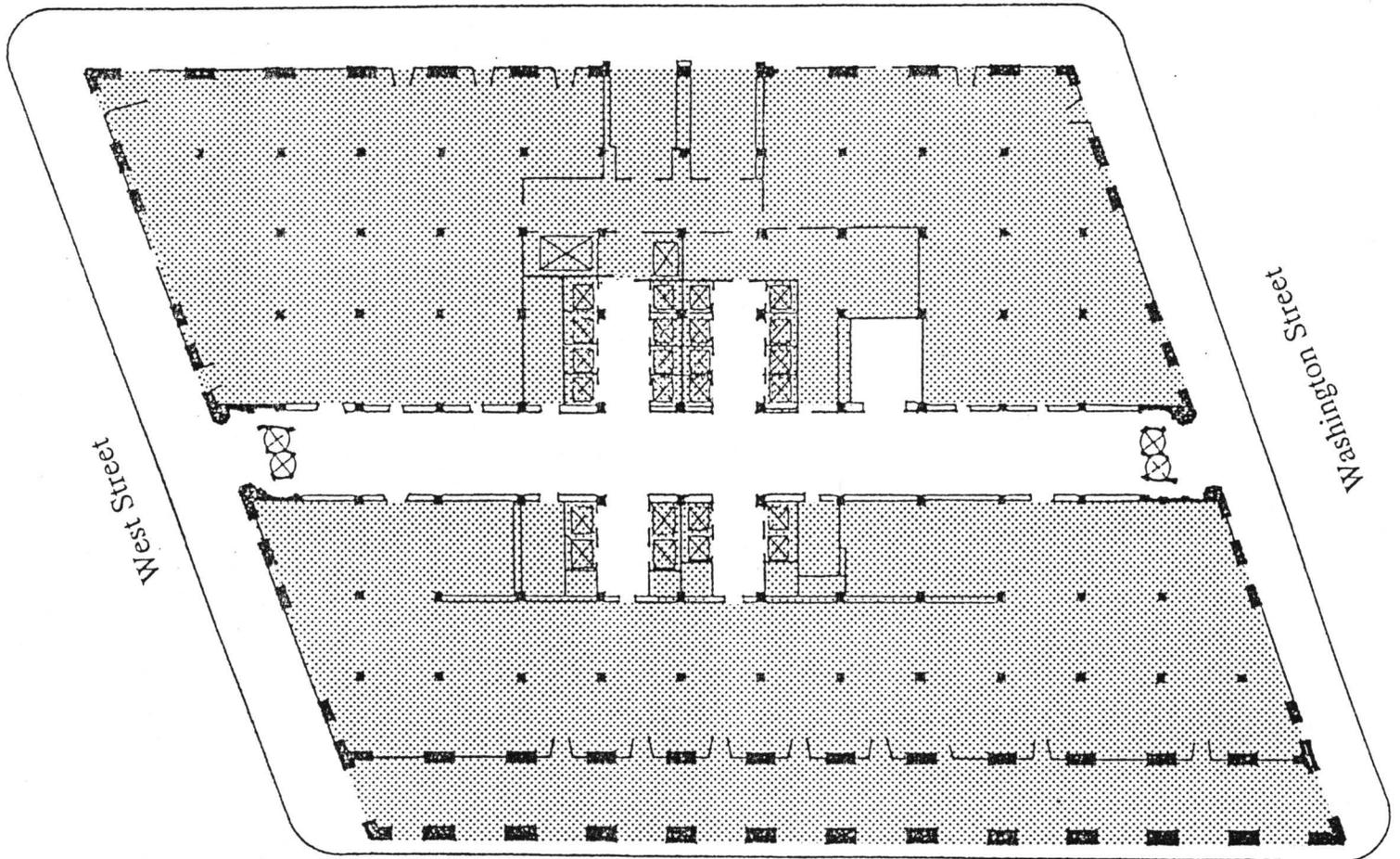
Yearbook of the Architectural League of New York. New York: The Architectural League, 1927.

BARCLAY VESEY BUILDING

FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR

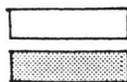
140 West Street

Barclay Street



Vesey Street

Designated Area
Area not Designated



October 1, 1991



North

Figure 1.

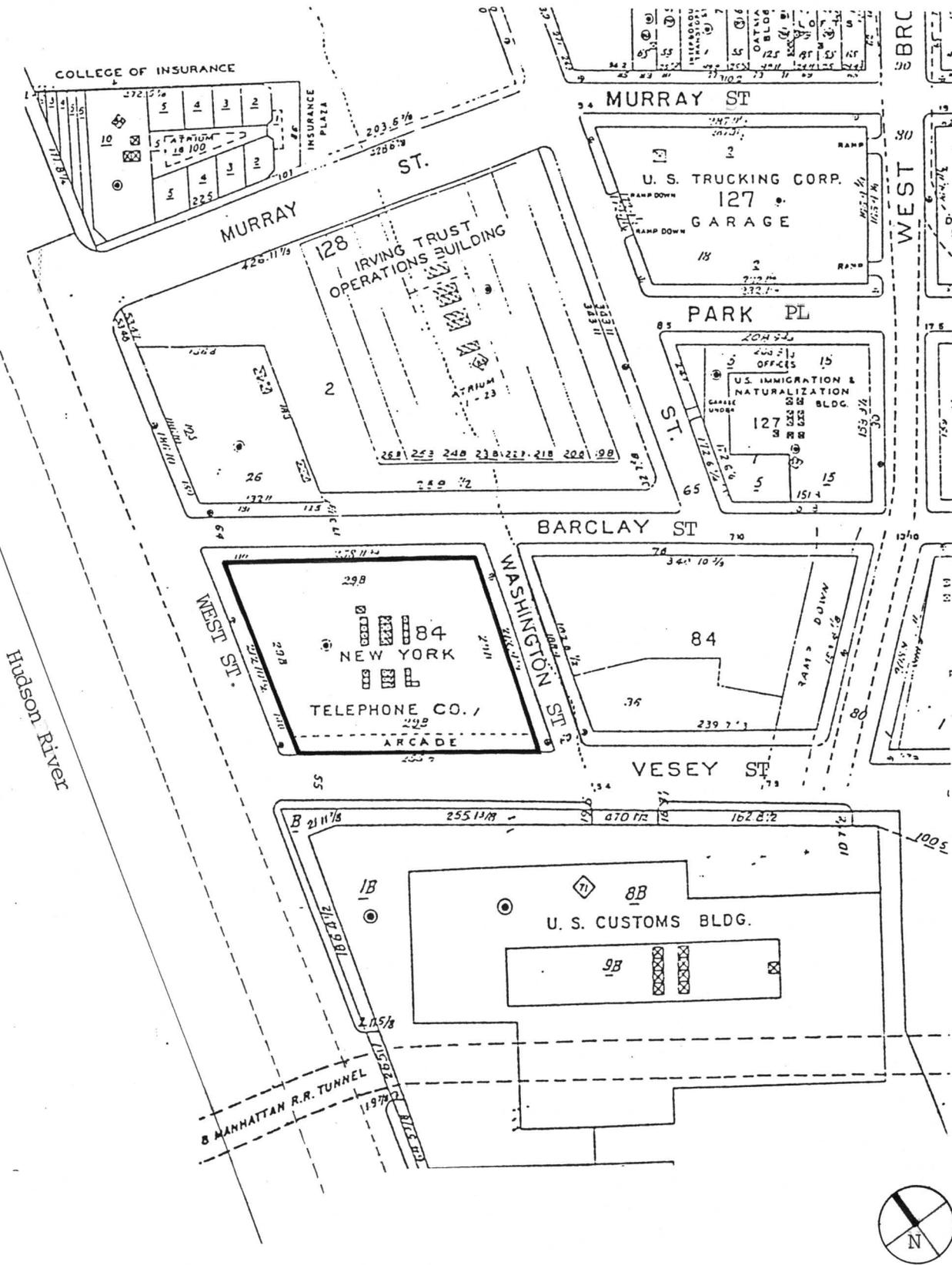


Fig. 2: The Barclay-Vesey Building, 140 West Street, Block 84, Lot 1, Landmark Site. (Graphic Source: Sanborn, Manhattan Land Book, 1988-89.)



Fig. 3: First floor interior, looking east. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster.)

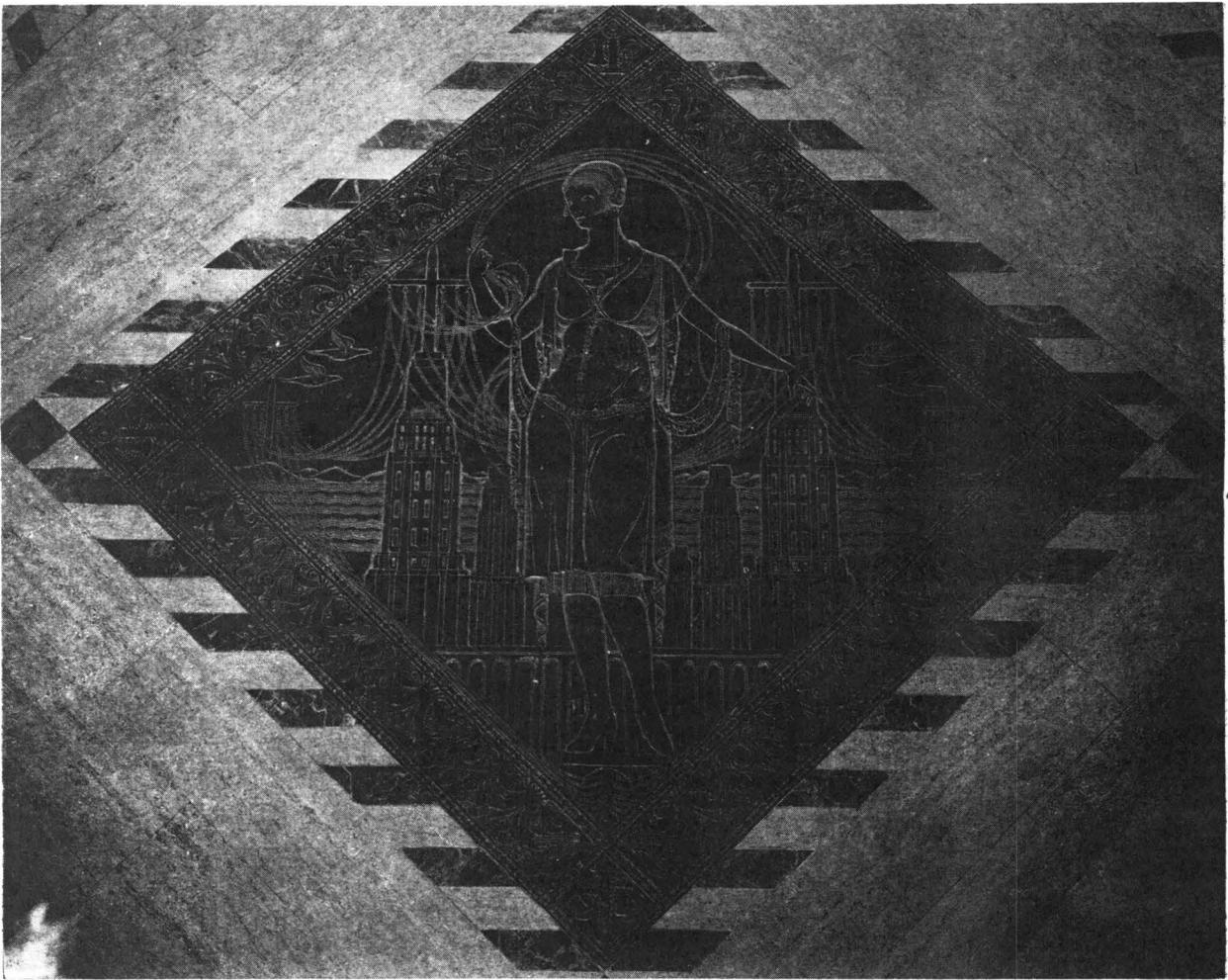


Fig. 4: View of bronze floor plaque. (*The American Architect*, Nov. 20, 1926, 409.)

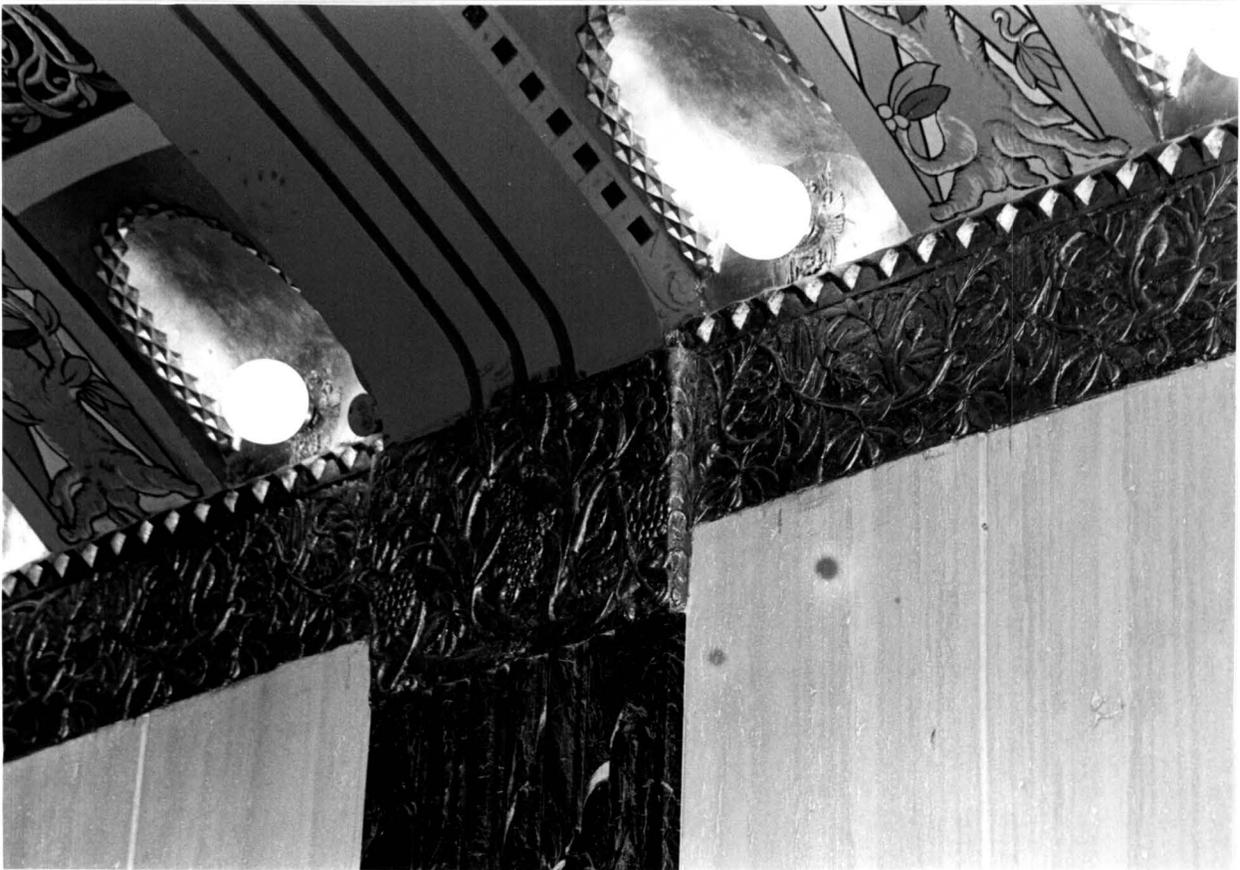


Fig. 5: Detail of wall frieze with recessed ceiling lights. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster.)



Fig. 6: Detail of northern corridor wall showing area between elevator alcoves.
(Photo Credit: Carl Forster.)

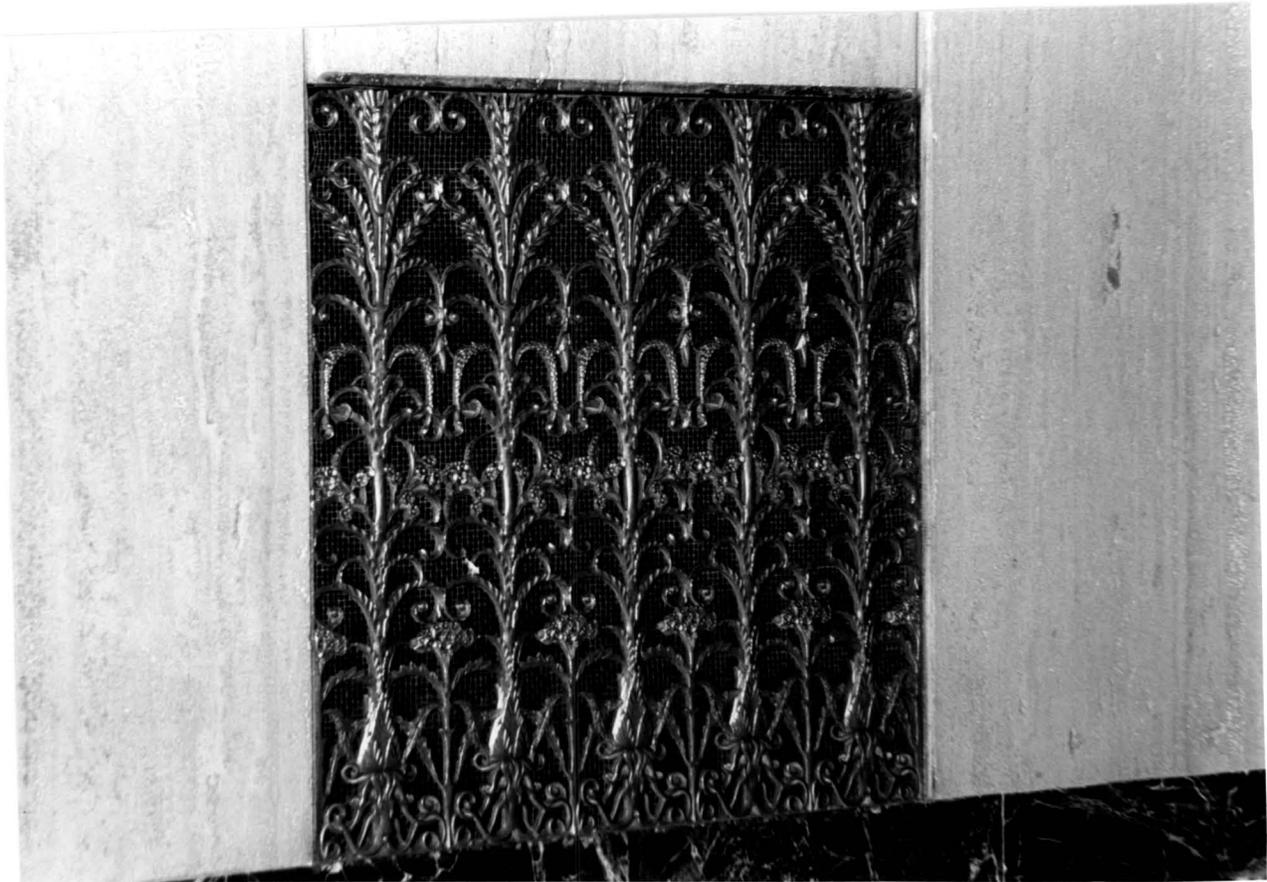


Fig. 7: Typical bronze grille found in main corridor. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster.)



Fig. 8: View of corridor, looking west. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster.)



Fig. 9: Painted ceiling panel depicting Romans communicating by fire. This is the fourth panel from the western entrance.

(Photo Credits: Carl Forster.)

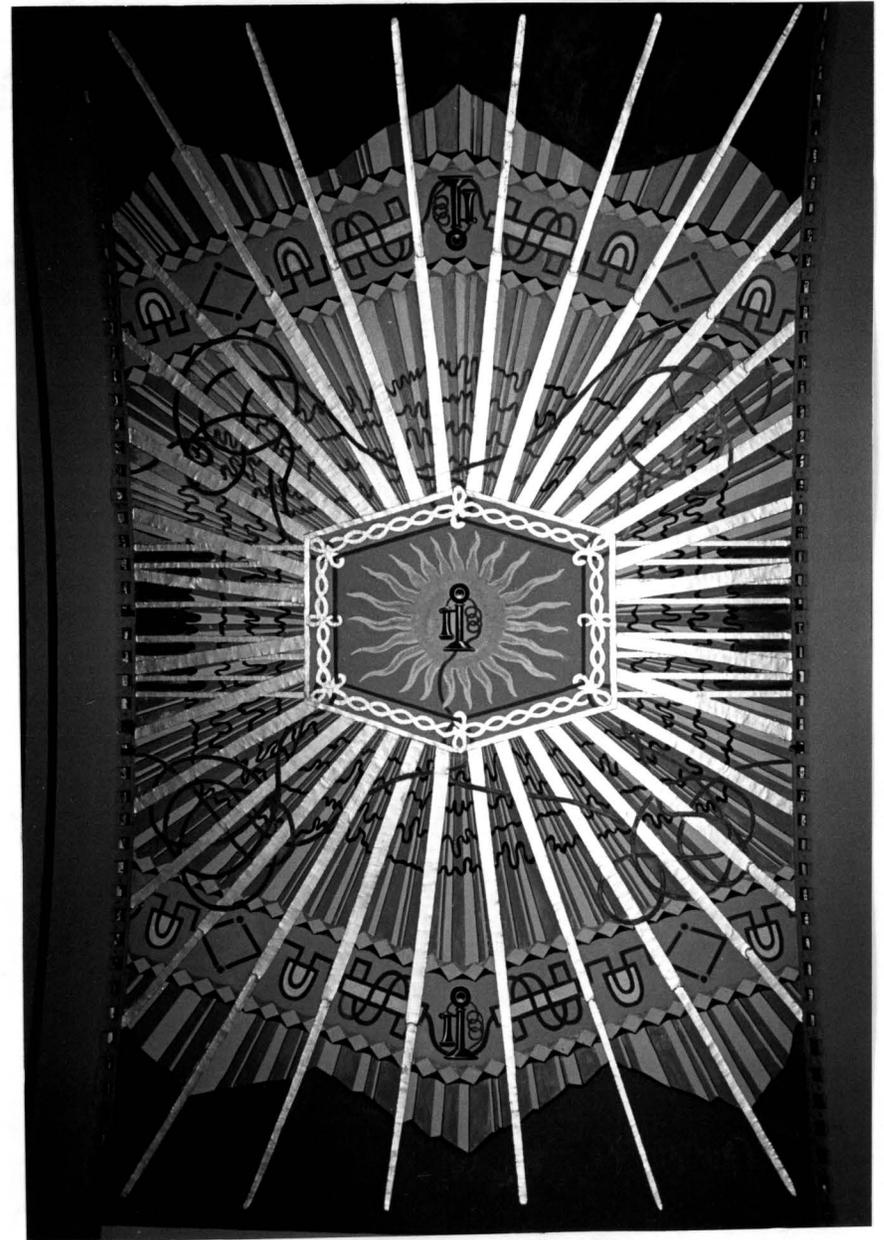


Fig. 10: Central painted ceiling panel, part of a group of three, representing the linking of the telephone, telegraph, and radio.



Fig. 11: Bronze chandelier. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster.)

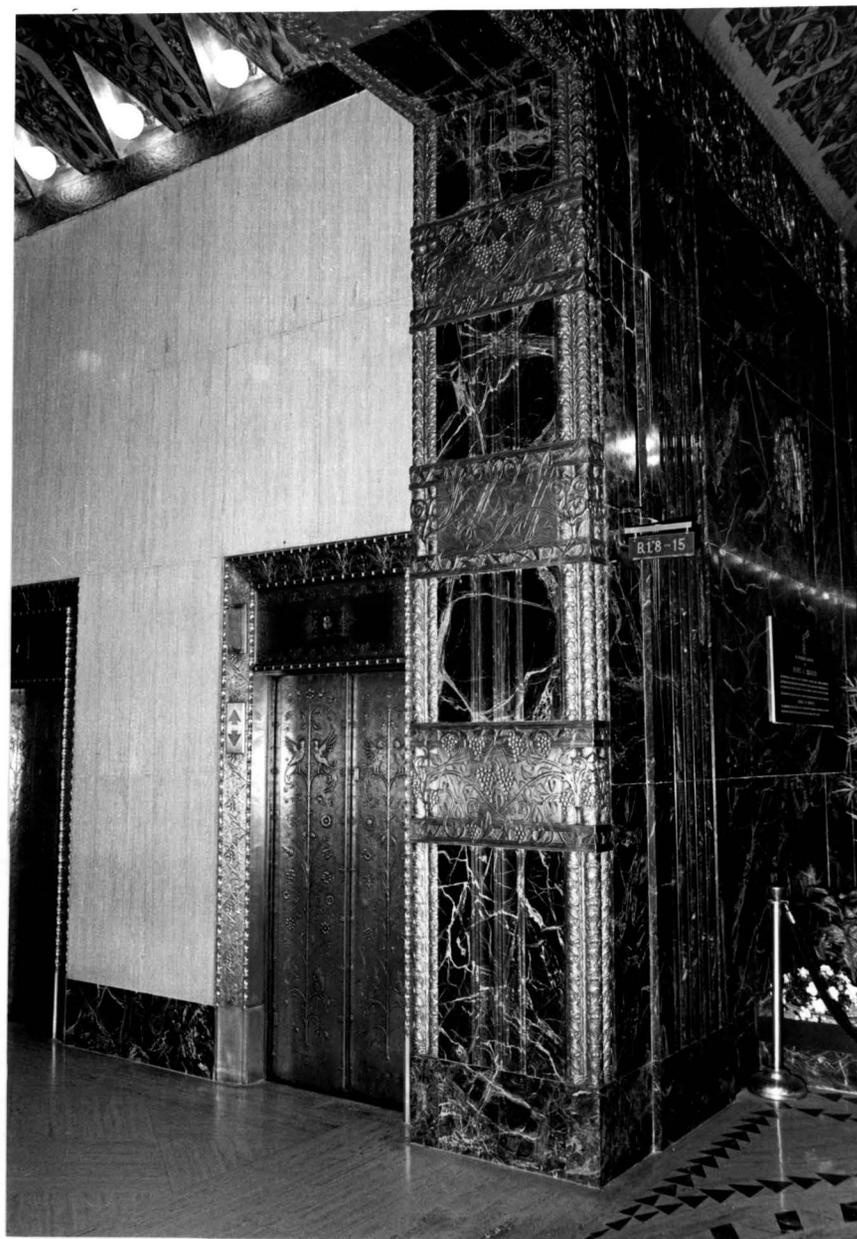


Fig. 12: View showing elevator doors. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster.)

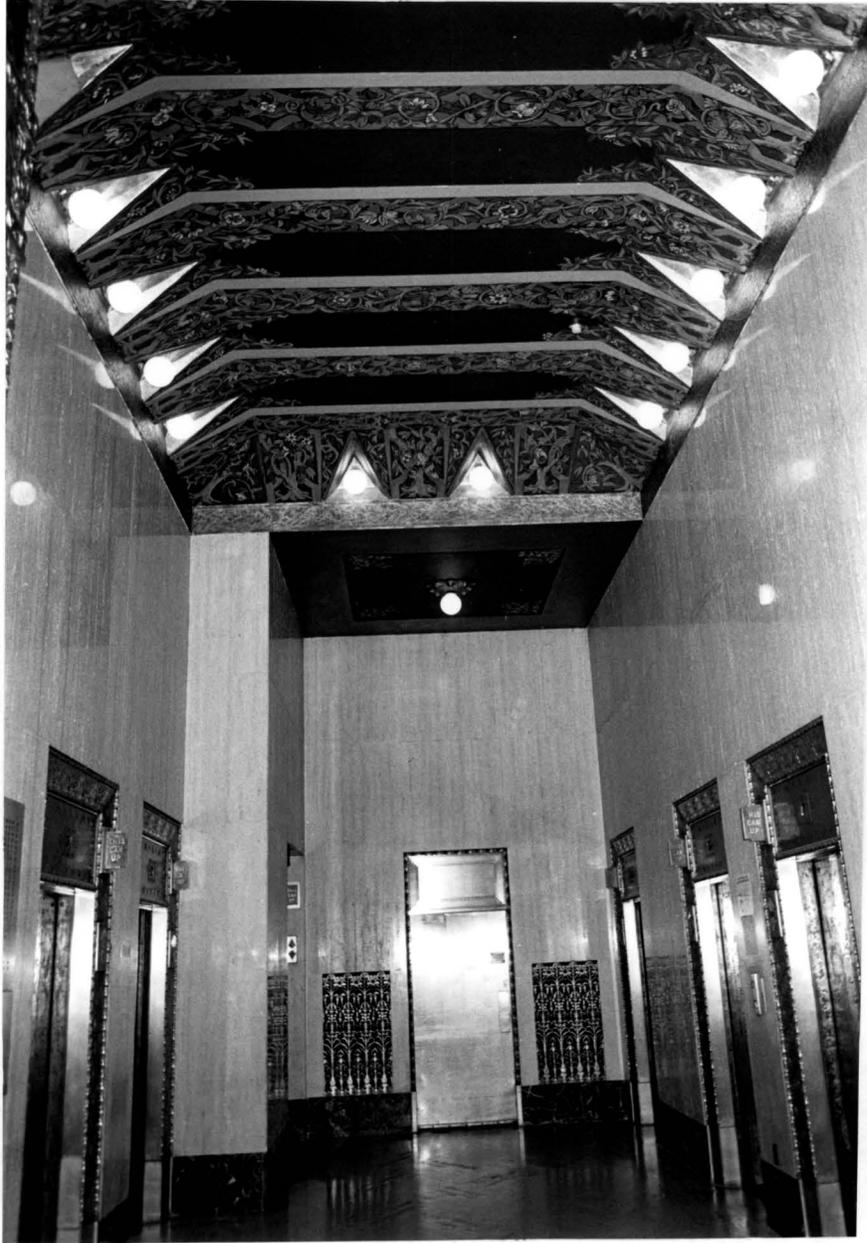


Fig. 13: North wall elevator alcove. The smaller southern elevator alcoves do not include the back area with the dropped ceiling. (Photo Credit: Carl Forster.)