

THE LONG DISTANCE BUILDING OF THE AMERICAN TELEPHONE & TELEGRAPH COMPANY, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR consisting of the Sixth Avenue entrance vestibule with its auditorium alcove, the Sixth Avenue lobby with its perpendicular elevator corridors, the Church Street corridor, the Church Street entrance vestibule with its alcove, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, floor surfaces, wall and ceiling surfaces including the mosaics, doors, elevator doors, and attached decorative elements, 32 Sixth Avenue (a/k/a 24-42 Sixth Avenue, 310-322 Church Street, 14-28 Walker Street, and 4-30 Lispenard Street), Manhattan.

Built in 1911-14; Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz and McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, architects. Enlarged in 1914-16; McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, architects. Enlarged again and renovated in 1930-32; Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 192, Lot 1.

On September 19, 1989, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the New York Telephone Company Building (a/k/a Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company) **FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR** consisting of the Sixth Avenue entrance vestibule, Sixth Avenue lobby, the Church Street entrance vestibule, Church Street lobby and the lobby connecting the Sixth Avenue lobby and the Church Street lobby, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, floor surfaces, wall and ceiling surfaces including the mosaics, doors, elevator doors, and attached decorative elements, 24-42 Sixth Avenue, Manhattan, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 34). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses spoke in favor of designation. A representative of the owner did not take a position regarding the designation and no witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. Subsequently, the owner indicated it would not oppose designation. The Commission has received a letter in favor of designation from the Community Board in which the building is located.

Summary

The first floor lobby of the Long Distance Building was commissioned by telephone executive James S. McCulloh and designed by Ralph Walker, an architect who earned his reputation through his Art Deco towers and his wide range of buildings for the communications industry. The irregularly-shaped lobby and the building which it serves were erected in 1930-32 as massive alterations to the telephone exchange building previously known as the Walker Lispenard Building. Throughout its long succession of partnerships Walker's firm designed many telephone company buildings, this being one of the largest and best known. Designed to be a harmonious complement in material and detailing to the structure's exterior, the lobby displays a linear decorative motif which underscores, in an abstract way, the great distances spanned by telephone lines and radio waves. The lobby also features an iconographic program which clearly and artfully broadcasts that structure's significance as a hub of international communication. Appointed with a terrazzo floor,

ceramic iron-spot wall tiles with bronze details, and multi-hued glass mosaic tiles, the interior spaces are articulated in an Art Deco aesthetic, an especially appropriate choice given that style's associations with technology. The lobby remains largely intact in form, finish, and function as the gateway to an important center of communications.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Early History of the Site¹

The developmental history of Block 192, on which the Long Distance Building now stands, is similar to that of the surrounding Tribeca neighborhood. During the late eighteenth century, the block was wholly within the farm of the Lispenard family. The streets adjacent to this block were laid out in the first years of the nineteenth century and paved in 1810; development quickly followed in the form of frame and masonry dwellings. During the commercial transformation of the neighborhood later in the century, some of the dwellings were converted to business use and others were replaced by store and loft buildings, largely of five stories. However, clusters of older structures survived into the twentieth century at the northwest and southeast corners of the block. In 1909 the New York Telephone Company purchased nine contiguous lots, forming an irregularly-shaped parcel with fronts on both Walker and Lispenard Streets, on which it planned to build its headquarters.

The New York Telephone Company, AT&T, and the Long Lines Department²

The telephone business developed rapidly following the early successes of Alexander Graham Bell's inventions in the 1870s. Many small, regional companies were created such as the New York Telephone Company, but these came to be controlled by the American Bell Telephone Company. In 1885, a subsidiary of American Bell, the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T, and commonly called the Long Distance Company), was incorporated in New York with the purpose of building and operating long-distance telephone lines and connecting the regional companies. By the turn of the century AT&T had become the central institution of the Bell System. It assumed the holding-company functions previously exercised by American Bell and

continued to operate long-distance telephone service -- eventually extending to radio-telephone circuits for overseas calls -- through its Long Lines Department. During the early twentieth century, the department's revenues increased dramatically (from \$12 million in 1913 to nearly \$100 million in 1930) and the necessary infrastructure was built to handle this growth, including many large office and operations structures. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Bell Telephone Company consistently chose for its corporate skyscrapers a modernistic architectural aesthetic and, in so doing, established itself as a prominent and progressive modern business.

Among the people who played a vital role in the organization of the industry was Union N. Bethell (1859-1919),³ who was first employed by the Bell System in 1889. The general manager of the independent New York Telephone Company by 1893, his business skills proved essential to the industry, which had achieved mechanical adequacy but suffered from poor organization. By destroying the popular conception of the telephone as a luxury item, doubling the number of pay stations, and lowering rates, Bethell democratized the telephone and gradually he assumed the management of the local telephone companies in all the Mid-Atlantic states. Bethell was made vice president of AT&T in 1910 and concurrently commissioned the Walker Lispenard Building. As the president of New York Telephone, he was also responsible for the seven-story addition, begun in 1914, to that same building.

Another influential person in the development of the telephone company and of this site was James S. McCulloh (1868/69-1957).⁴ As a young man in his native New Jersey, employed by the West Shore Railroad and the Western Union Telegraph Company, McCulloh studied telephone and telegraph operations, wire testing, and line construction and maintenance. His first contact with AT&T came in 1893 when he joined the Long Lines Department in New York City. He quickly

rose to the position of chief operator and was appointed assistant superintendent of the company's New York Division. Responsible for general traffic studies and development, McCulloh's authority was extended to the Midwest and New England divisions. His 1904 appointment as superintendent of buildings and supplies for the New York Telephone Company led to a vice presidency in charge of public relations and commercial work. As president he commissioned the 1930-32 expansion of the Walker Lispenard Building, resulting in the present appearance of the Long Distance Building and its lobby. He served on the company's executive committee of the board of directors before retiring in 1938.

Design and Construction of the Walker Lispenard and Long Distance Buildings⁵

The present Long Distance Building is the product of three distinct building campaigns, the first two of which resulted in what was known as the Walker Lispenard Building. In 1909 the New York Telephone Company purchased seven contiguous structures on Block 192, six store and loft buildings and one dwelling, and replaced them in 1911-14 with a seventeen-story office building and telephone exchange. At the filing of the New Building Application, the architects estimated the cost to be \$1,400,000.

Designed by Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz and his successor firm, McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, the edifice's plan was shaped like a backward "J." The Romanesque Revival building, which extended 125 feet along Walker Street and eighty-nine feet along Lispenard Street, survives, though its exterior has been altered. The first-floor lobby, which served four elevators, survives to some extent, but was later expanded and redecorated. AT&T and New York Telephone occupied the first twelve stories of the new building and the Western Union Telegraph Company occupied the upper five stories.

Two months after the long-distance central office was placed in service in January, 1914, an Alteration Application was filed to increase the structure to twenty-four stories.⁶ Designed by McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, this seven-story addition extended the exterior architectural features of the earlier design. This addition was completed before 1919. The building served as

AT&T's long-distance telephone central office, the largest in the country, with 1470 switchboard and test board positions and 2200 long-distance lines to other cities, and a trans-Atlantic radio-telephone switchboard. The New York Telephone Company occupied stories eighteen to twenty-three, maintaining two of its sixty-two telephone central offices for Manhattan there.⁷ Within the next decade the expanded building was also outgrown.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, two municipal improvement programs altered the configuration of Block 192.⁸ A subway tunnel was dug beneath Church Street and the streetbed was widened by forty feet, causing the demolition in 1931 of six buildings along the west side of the street between Walker and Lispenard Streets. Concurrently Sixth Avenue was extended southward to White Street, destroying the structures on the western third of the block. Furthermore, the surviving small nineteenth-century buildings⁹ flanking the Walker Lispenard Building were demolished and their sites incorporated into an expanded telephone exchange structure.

Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker filed plans in September, 1929, for the enlargement and refacing of the Walker Lispenard Building.¹⁰ In brief, the irregularly-shaped existing building received a multi-story penthouse and two large extensions, filling in the entire block except for the northwestern point (see fig. 1). Demolition of the adjacent smaller structures began in April, 1930; construction was completed in 1932 and the mass exodus of workers and their equipment from No. 15 Dey Street and five other locations to the newly enlarged headquarters occurred during March and April of that year.¹¹

As in his designs for other buildings, Walker united the lobby of the Long Distance Building to the new exterior by various architectural means: the entrances to the lobby are set into broad, proscenium-like recesses in the exterior skin; the exterior brick "curtains" are reflected in the earth-colored tiles of the lobby's rippled walls; and the linear character of the ornament, including the zig-zag bronze grilles, is common to both exterior and interior. Configured to connect the entrances at Sixth Avenue and Church Street with the elevator banks, the first floor interior (see fig. 2) is provided with entrances to important service areas such as the auditorium and mail room. To attain

a feeling of spaciousness within the corridor-like lobby, the surfaces of the walls and ceiling are "woven" together visually through the use of a repeated linear pattern executed in multi-colored glass mosaic. The pattern is united to the walls through the alignment with the reddish-brown piers and to the ceiling through the repetition of painted green fields. Artfully designed light fixtures provide dramatic indirect illumination, which accentuates the glitter of the mosaic tile.

The alterations were carried out by the construction firm of Marc Eidlitz & Son.¹² Workmanship on the building was recognized by the New York Building Congress which awarded certificates of craftsmanship and gold buttons to members of the construction crew, including the painter and decorator, Gustav Johnson, as well as the marble polisher, the marble setter, the ornamental iron worker, the terrazzo worker and his assistant, and the tile setter and his assistant.¹³

The Architects of the Walker Lispenard and Long Distance Buildings

For the design of its Walker Lispenard Building, the New York Telephone Company chose Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz (1853-1921)¹⁴ and his successor firm of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin. Andrew McKenzie (1861-1926),¹⁵ educated in Buffalo, arrived in New York City in 1884 and worked for the firm of Babb, Cook & Willard. The partnership of Eidlitz & McKenzie, which was active from 1902 to 1909, is best remembered for its New York Times Building at Times Square. Stephen Voorhees (1878-1965),¹⁶ who studied civil engineering at Princeton University, began to practice with Eidlitz & McKenzie as a civil engineer and superintendent of construction in 1902; one of his first jobs was the supervision of the foundation work for the New York Times Building. German-born Paul Gmelin (1859-1937)¹⁷ studied in Stuttgart; he came to this country as a young draftsman, was briefly associated with the firm of 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 and McKenzie & Gmelin's successful relationships with the telephone company, with commissions for

buildings in New York City, Albany, and Buffalo. While a high percentage of its work at this time was telephone-related,¹⁸ the firm also designed the Brooklyn Municipal Building (1924-27) and private residences. McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin was active through 1925.

For the transformation of its Walker Lispenard Building into the Long Distance Building as we know it today, the telephone company hired the same firm, which had become Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. In 1919 Ralph Walker (1889-1973)¹⁹ 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, though his two-year trip to Italy was postponed by the war. During the war, Walker served with the Army Corps of Engineers in France. He 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 (1923-27, a designated New York City Landmark). Around the time of the completion of the building and following the death of McKenzie, Walker became a partner in the firm, whose name then became Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. The success of the Barclay-Vesey Building and subsequent commissions brought Walker recognition as one of the city's prominent designers of Art Deco skyscrapers. Considered the main designer of the firm, he was a prolific architect, working almost exclusively for corporate clients, and often for the Bell System, becoming a specialist in the design of that industry's buildings. Among his subsequent commissions were the Western Union Building at 60 Hudson Street (1928-30, a designated New York City Landmark), the Irving Trust Company Building at 1 Wall Street (1929-31), and the Long Distance Building at 32 Sixth Avenue (1930-32). Walker also

designed buildings for General Foods and IBM and several pavilions for firms at the 1939 World's Fair in New York.

Active in professional circles, Walker served as president of several prominent architectural organizations. In 1957 the American Institute of Architects gave Walker the title of "architect of the century." In the following year Walker resigned from active participation in the firm, then known as Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines, but continued his association with the firm in the capacity of a consultant. The firm continued in various forms and is today known as Haines, Lundberg & Wachler.

Zoning and the Creation of a Modern Style

The Building Zone Resolution²⁰

Attempting to address the problems of an increasingly overbuilt city, the 1916 Building Zone Resolution had a tremendous impact on architecture in New York; the final form and appearance of the skyscrapers of the 1920s owe much to this law, which sought in part to bring about the "more beautiful city" through the use of building setbacks. The building shape that resulted from the zoning restrictions took the form of a ziggurat, often topped by a tower or a pair of towers.

Architects drew artistic inspiration from the building forms which resulted from the 1916 zoning law.²¹ 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* in 1923, which illustrated progressive stages of design based on the law's restrictions.²² The drawings and the laws from which they came directed the architects' attention to the building as a whole rather than to a single facade of the structure, thus altering the whole design process. By visualizing buildings "from every possible angle," the architect was transformed from a designer of facades into a "sculptor in building masses."²³ Thus, a new "skyscraper style" emerged in the 1920s,²⁴ which generated further interest as its peculiar American quality was realized. Major characteristics of the new style, as generated by the zoning restrictions, were sculpted massing, bold setbacks, and ornament subordinated to the overall mass.²⁵

Clearly reflecting the current interest of the designers, the new style was commonly called "modernistic."

"Modernistic" Art Deco²⁶

As the influence of the New York City Building Zone Resolution spread, architects realized that historical styles were no longer appropriate for their skyscraper designs. In their search for an appropriate architecture, many combined the mandated setbacks with the ornamental aesthetic popularized by the 1925 Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels in Paris. In America, architects focused on the linear quality, streamlined forms, and geometrically composed ornament illustrated at the show and adapted these elements to their vertically articulated skyscraper designs. Naturalistic forms such as plants, animals, and human figures were also used, but were abstracted and incorporated into flattened patterns so as to detract from historical associations. Materials assumed an important role as well. The colors and textures of brick, limestone, highly-colored marbles, bronze and other metals were juxtaposed in an attempt to create dramatic effects. In his 1928 book *New Dimensions: the Decorative Arts of Today in Words & Pictures*, designer Paul T. Frankl stressed the importance of indirect lighting and the absence of unnecessary ornament in order to bring forward the natural beauty of a material. He also wrote, "Brick tapestries hung from the sky are as decorative as anything yet done on a large scale. Mosaics of colored stones or tinted bricks are being used most effectively in this new art," a "truly American" style of skyscraper that was a "monument of American business and enterprise."²⁷ For interior spaces, designers emphasized linear ornament, bold or contrasting materials, and the meshing of wall and ceiling surfaces. Reaching its zenith in popularity between 1928 and 1931 in New York City, this new architectural style was used mainly for "modernistic" setback skyscrapers and their interiors. By the time of its critical re-assessment in the 1960s and '70s the style had achieved the popular name of Art Deco.²⁸

Outstanding Art Deco design is often associated with Walker, among New York's foremost architects who interpreted the modernistic skyscraper style in unusually stunning

interiors. These interiors, though influenced by diverse aesthetic models, are united by common features such as linearity, the melding of wall and ceiling planes, and the continuity of exterior architectural themes. An architect from Walker's firm explained in 1930 that the casting aside of traditional forms was an attempt to express the modernity of the telephone industry and that the blurring of a clear division between wall and ceiling planes was an attempt to engender a sense of spaciousness.²⁹ Walker's designs for the lobby of the Barclay-Vesey Building combine the verticality of a vaulted ceiling with the organic themes popularized by various turn-of-the-century artistic movements to achieve a grand interior space. In the lobby of the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company Building (c. 1927-28, Newark) he simplifies the themes of the Barclay-Vesey Building beneath an origami-like ceiling treatment to create another dazzling interior. At Walker's Western Union Building, an Art Deco gem particularly influenced by European Expressionism, he achieves a "sense of structural freedom" enabled by the steel skeleton which "produces a fresh impulse toward new forms and decoration" on both the exterior and interior.³⁰ Within the lobby of the Long Distance Building the architect is inspired by woven designs, possibly derived from the building's function, since long distance operators were described by the telephone company as "Weavers of Speech."³¹ Although not commissioned by the communications industry, Walker's other Art Deco tower in downtown Manhattan, the glistening, limestone sheathed Irving Trust Building with its vibrantly-colored mosaic-sheathed lobby, completes his experiments in the design of Art Deco towers.

The Long Distance Building Lobby and the Communications Industry³²

As part of the general trend toward modernity, many designers of the period focused on the importance of modern technology and its role in the expression of the new machine-age aesthetic. 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."³³ As architects began to understand the potential of modern construction techniques and machine-processed materials, they

specified their use in construction. Often, architects designed decorative motifs, executed by craftsmen, to represent modern technology: in the lobby of the Long Distance Building linear patterns of terrazzo, iron-spot tile, and glass mosaic represent the long-distance telephone lines and criss-crossed wires of the long-distance switchboards; in a less abstract fashion, the ceiling's central decorative program illustrates the telephone's ability to unite the far-flung corners of the world (see figs. 3-4, and 9-13).

The new structure consolidated all but one of New York's units of the Long Lines Department, including the company's general offices (which previously were located at 15 Dey Street). This building was the crossroads of all main trunk routes of the Bell System in the Northeast, with 3000 direct circuits radiating to about 360 cities in North America. The cable network controlled from the premises reached from Maine to North Carolina along the Atlantic and as far west as Wisconsin, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. Transoceanic radio-telephone circuits terminated at the building, which meant all telephone calls between North America and overseas locations³⁴ were handled there as well as all calls requiring the connection of two radio circuits (for example, Bermuda to Europe) via five separate channels.³⁵ The most technologically current communication services were available through the building: the teletypewriter exchange offered the rapid interchange of typed messages and the telephotograph, or Picture-by-Wire, permitted transmission between New York and seven other major American cities. Telephone wires were also used to transmit radio programs by the major broadcasting companies.³⁶ The private lines (telephone, teletypewriter, or telegraph) used by the press and financial institutions were routed through the building.

Called a "small city"³⁷ and exemplifying Walker's theories of modern buildings, the Long Distance Building operated twenty-four hours a day. Within its walls were dormitories; a kitchen and three cafeterias (stories seven through nine); a 500-person auditorium, for employee recreational and educational programs (first story); other recreation spaces and a medical department. About eighty-five percent of the 800,000 square feet of rentable area was destined for the toll and Long Lines Department offices. The upper levels

were reserved for administrative uses; the executive offices were located on the twenty-sixth story and the legal, personnel, and publicity departments were perched at the twenty-seventh story (and thus beyond the reach of the elevators!).³⁸ To accommodate the 5,500 workers,³⁹ the number of passenger elevators was increased from the original four to thirty-two.

Description

The first-floor interior of the Long Distance Building is divided, by the configuration of the irregular plan and by differences in the height and the decorative treatment of the ceiling, into distinct smaller sections: (1) the Sixth Avenue entrance vestibule, consisting of a bronze bank of two revolving doors and two pairs of auxiliary doors, a high-ceilinged space, and an adjacent alcove that leads to the auditorium; (2) the Sixth Avenue lobby, featuring a central section and three perpendicular corridors with low ceilings adjacent to the elevator banks; (3) the Church Street corridor, united by a continuous border treatment of the ceiling, but divided by a jog into a western section characterized by its central axis of chamfered piers and an unobstructed eastern section; and (4) the Church Street entrance vestibule, consisting of a bronze bank of two revolving doors and two pairs of auxiliary doors which face a square space, and a large rectangular alcove (surviving from the original lobby) with a low ceiling, three piers along its long axis, and a bank of elevators (see figs. 2-6).

These spaces are united by the harmonious colors and textures of a limited number of materials, by the consistent use of indirect lighting, and by the linear motif of the decoration. The terrazzo floor consists of gray borders around an off-white field that is enlivened by gray stripes representing the predominant patterns of circulation through the space. A burnt orange marble base runs along the bottom of the vertical surfaces throughout the public spaces of the first floor interior. Walls, which vary between flat surfaces and subtly angled surfaces, are finished in umber (called "rose pink" in a contemporary account) iron-spot ceramic tiles, laid vertically, and interrupted by pilasters of trebled V-shaped Indian red tiles. The walls contain bronze ventilation grilles, with their pieces arranged in a modified

grid, and unusual light fixtures which vary from pointed to zig-zag fronts, in order to align with the wall. Along the walls, each of the partly recessed fixtures consists of a bronze-framed rectangular opening revealing a curved white trough whose light source is hidden by four chevron-shaped glass panes resting in a hopper-like fashion on bronze clips at the bottom portion of the opening; at the piers, each light fixture projects from the vertical surface with glass panes on three sides and rests on a bronze base. An Indian red clock with bronze-colored numerals is mounted on the wall in the Sixth Avenue lobby. Surrounded by simple bronze frames, the doors throughout the space, including the elevator doors, have bronze surfaces inscribed by vertical and horizontal lines. Blurring the distinction between wall and ceiling, the Indian red pilasters align with multi-colored mosaic decoration on the ceiling and are flanked at the upper portion of the walls by brown, orange, and gold mosaic bands which are continued onto the ceiling surface. This embellishment is framed by a painted green field (in each section of the lobby the hue of green varies slightly) with a green mosaic border, which contrasts with the mauve color of the remainder of the stuccoed ceiling (see figs. 6 and 7). Over the elevator corridors, ceiling decoration includes green mosaic bands with gold-colored waves and dark chevron patterns on a lighter background.

Variations in these conditions occur where the building fabric predates or postdates the 1930-32 alteration. In the rectangular alcove of the Church Street vestibule, the painted metal doors (surviving from the original lobby) are framed by tile surrounds with zig-zag heads. One of the original four arms of the Sixth Avenue corridor was closed off with a wall that, except for its uniformity of light-colored orange tiles, almost matches the 1930-32 alteration; this section of wall is pierced by a bronze door and also features a bronze letter box.

Representational elements that relate to the building's use are prominent within the lobby (see figs. 3, 4 and 9-13). The south wall of the Sixth Avenue entrance vestibule is adorned with a map of the world -- a twenty-three-by-sixteen-foot rectangle formed in tiles similar to those of the simpler walls but expanding the color range -- titled "TELEPHONE WIRES AND RADIO UNITE TO MAKE NEIGHBORS OF

NATIONS." The ceiling decoration includes figures, set on the stuccoed mauve ceiling surface, which are executed in multi-hued glass mosaic with the flesh represented in painted stucco. Along the central axis of the ceiling of the Sixth Avenue lobby, are depicted two almost identical⁴⁰ allegorical female messengers with eagles at their shoulders. One of the women holds wavy lines (symbolizing wires) which lead to allegorical figures of four continents located along the sides of the ceiling. Australia holds a sheaf of wheat and rests her arm on the back of a sheep while a kangaroo stands in the near background. Asia, represented by a female ruler flanked by a tiger and an elephant, reclines before two pagoda-like structures. Africa, an Egyptian queen holding a fan and flanked by a pair of lions, gestures before the pyramids. Crowned Europe, holding a spear and an orb, reclines on an Ionic capital in front of a Roman aqueduct, the dome of St. Peter's in Rome, and the towers of Notre Dame de Paris.

Later intrusions into the lobby are minor. Two of the four original elevator openings (now in the alcove of the Church Street entrance vestibule) were blocked up and refinished to blend with the surrounding wall. The southeastern arm of the Sixth Avenue corridor was separated from the rest of the lobby with a tile wall and bronze door. A

subway entrance with a sign was inserted near the southwestern arm. Other additions include wall-mounted features such as signage with the AT&T logo, an auditorium sign, a bronze war memorial plaque with flag mounts, speakers, a Fire Command sign and no smoking signs, ashtrays, a bulletin board, a display case, security cameras, a house telephone, light fixtures that accentuate the mosaic figures, and an elevator control panel; and floor-mounted items such as a security desk, benches, and planters.

Subsequent History

The lobby remains largely as it was completed in 1932, except for the changes noted above. The building retains its significance to the communications industry, accommodating AT&T's television and long-distance telephone operations, departments such as sales and marketing, and some corporate offices.⁴¹

*Report prepared by David M. Breiner
Research Department*

*Report edited by Elisa Urbanelli
Research Department Editor*

NOTES

1. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Block 192; *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York* (1810) VI, 217, 324, 383, 429; *Atlas of the Entire City of New York* (New York, 1879), pl. 5; *Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx* (New York, 1885), pl. 4.

2. AT&T, *The Story of a Great Achievement: Telephone Communication from Coast to Coast* (New York, 1915); William Chauncey Langdon, *The Early Corporate Development of the Telephone* (New York, 1935); Horace Coon, *American Tel & Tel: The Story of a Great Monopoly* (New York, 1939), 173-77; N.R. Danielian, *A.T.&T. The Story of Industrial Conquest* (New York, 1939), 9-14; AT&T, *Our Company and How It Operates* (New York, 1941); Frank B. Jewett, *100 Years of Electrical Communication in the United States* (New York, [1944]), 15-16; AT&T, *The Telephone in America* (New York, 1948), 17-26, 52-55.

3. Union N. Bethell obituary, *New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1933, p.13. Considered an authority on telephone policy, finance, and management, Bethell was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun in 1909 by the Japanese emperor and served as chairman of the operating board of the United States Telephone and Telegraph Administration during World War I.

4. James McCulloh obituary, *NYT*, July 6, 1957, p. 15.

5. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Block 192; "\$1,250,000 Telephone Building," *NYT*, Feb. 5, 1911, sect. 8, p.1; NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, NB 229-1911; *Real Estate Record & Guide* 87 (Apr. 29, 1911), 793. *NYT*, June 28, 1914, sect.1, p.3, and "Western Union Moves to 24 Walker Street Without a Hitch," *NYT*, June 29, 1914, p.13.

6. Alt 898-1914. See also *Real Estate Record & Guide* 93 (Mar. 21, 1914), 532.

7. "Company Plans Extensive Addition to Walker Street Building," *The Telephone Review* 21, no. 4 (Apr., 1930), 28.

8. "Want Church St. Widened 40 Feet," *NYT*, Mar. 21, 1928, p.48; "Sixth Av. Numbers Will Be Changed," *NYT*, Apr. 28, 1929, sect. 12, p.1; "Speeds Sixth Av. Artery," *NYT*, July 17, 1929, p.23; "Review of the Day in Realty Market. New York Telephone Company Buys Two Parcels on the Sixth Avenue Extension," *NYT*, Aug. 9, 1929, p.35; "Sixth Av. Extension To Be Opened Sept. 18," *NYT*, Sept. 8, 1930, p.2. NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 192. Demolition Permits 245-1929, 82-1930, 25-1931, and 26-1931.

9. These were No. 14-16 Lispenard Street, a six-story masonry structure designed by Gilbert A. Schellenger and erected in 1888-89; No. 26-28 Lispenard Street, a five-story masonry building; and No. 16 Walker Street, a five-story, cast-iron-fronted store and loft building. New York Public Library, *Photographic Views of New York City 1870's-1970's* (Ann Arbor, 1981), fiche 1012/C5. NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets.

10. "Plans \$6,000,000 Annex," *NYT*, Sept. 18, 1929, p.54, reports the estimated cost at \$6 million. The docket entry of Nov. 27, 1929 for Alt 2458-1929 gives \$7 million as the estimate; NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets. \$7 million is also recorded in *Real Estate Record & Guide* 124 (Dec. 7, 1929), 43.

11. AT&T, "Moving Out and Moving In," *Long Lines* (May, 1932), 6-7. Due to the presence of the existing building, power, steam, water, and ventilation systems had to be relocated, plumbing arrangements were altered, and 200 long-distance telephone cables were moved -- all without disrupting telephone service. During the summer of 1931, the second long-distance operating center was put into operation. The deepening economic depression necessitated the conservation and transferral of many furnishings from the former locations, which further complicated the move.

12. Marc Eidlitz & Son, founded during the mid-nineteenth century by Marc Eidlitz (d. 1892), uncle of architect Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz, was responsible for the erection of many notable New York buildings, such as the Astor Library, the Metropolitan Opera House, the Barclay-Vesey Building, the Western Union Building, the Irving Trust Bank Building, and the Cloisters. In 1938 the firm's name was changed to the Vermilya-Brown Company, Inc. Marc Eidlitz obituary, *American Architect and Building News* 36, no. 854 (1892), 77; *Vermilya-Brown Company, Inc. Builders* (New York, [1953]), n.p.

13. "Awards for Workers on Telephone Annex," *NYT*, Oct. 18, 1931, sect. 11, p.2. Nothing else is known about Gustav Johnson.

14. Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz obituary, *NYT*, Oct. 6, 1921, p. 17; Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City 1840-1900* (New York, 1979), 28; Henry F. Withey and Elsie R. Withey, "Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz," *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles, 1970), 192; "Eidlitz, Cyrus," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, ed. Adolf K. Placzek, vol. 2 (New York, 1982), 13.

Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines, *Telephone Buildings Since 1885* (New York, 1961), 3, indicates that

Eidlitz was commissioned in 1885 by the Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company, the predecessor of the New York Telephone Company, to design its first headquarters building at 18 Cortlandt Street. However, it was reported that this building was designed by McKenzie and Gmelin for a competition: Paul Gmelin obituary, *Herald Tribune*, Nov. 21, 1937, p.80. In any case, this was the first such building to be constructed in the United States and the first of a long series of telephone and telegraph company buildings on whose design the firm's partners would collaborate.

15. "McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, vol. 3, 139-40. *American Architect and Building News* 130 (Oct.-Dec., 1926), 402. The New York Times Building still stands, although its exterior cladding was destroyed in a remodeling of 1965.

16. *Who Was Who in America*, vol. 4 (Chicago, 1968), 973; *American Architects Directory*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1962), 730. Stephen Francis Voorhees obituary, *NYT*, Jan. 25, 1965, p.37.

17. Paul Gmelin obituary, *Herald Tribune*, Nov. 21, 1937, p.80; Withey and Withey, "Paul Gmelin," 237.

18. "McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*. By 1912 the firm (under its various partnerships) had completed approximately thirty new telephone buildings in New York City alone, not counting alterations and expansions. Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines, 39-45. The firm was also responsible for telephone exchanges on East 30th and West 73rd streets (both 1922) and the Barclay-Vesey Building (1926). Don Vlack, *Art Deco Architecture in New York 1920-40* (New York, 1974), 144, writes that the firm's work for the telephone company was "consistently articulate and exploratory."

19. Francis S. Swales, "Draftsmanship and Architecture as Exemplified by the Work of Ralph T. Walker," *Pencil Points* 11 (Aug., 1930), 609-14; "The New President," *Architectural Forum* 90 (Apr., 1949), 18; "Ralph Thomas Walker of New York Wins A.I.A. Presidential Race ...," *Architectural Record* 105 (Apr., 1949), 7, 10; Walker, *Ralph Walker -- Architect* (New York, 1957); "Walker, Skidmore named for top A.I.A. medals," *Architectural Forum* 106 (Feb., 1957), 7, 9; *Ralph Walker -- The American Institute of Architects 1921-1961* (New York, 1961); James Ward, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1900-1940* (New York, 1989); "Walker, Ralph Thomas," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, vol. 4, 363.

20. Carol Willis, "Zoning and Zeitgeist: The Skyscraper City in the 1920s," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45 (Mar., 1986), 47. This section of the report is adapted from LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report*, report prepared by Margaret Pickart (New York, 1991).

21. The 1922 Chicago Tribune Competition influenced architects, as well. The design of the second place winner, Eliel Saarinen, was highly regarded for its vertical emphasis and abstracted ornament, elements which appeared in numerous subsequent skyscraper designs.

22. The drawings showed 1) the maximum allowable bulk of the building and its form under the zoning law, 2) the addition of light courts to the basic block, 3) the incorporation of structural limitations, and 4) the incorporation of economic considerations. Finally, both Ferris and Corbett presented drawings of an architecturally "trimmed" design. Harvey Wiley Corbett, "Zoning and the Envelope of the Building," *Pencil Points* 4 (Apr., 1923), 15, 18.

23. Corbett, "Architecture," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., vol. 2 (Chicago, 1929), 275.

24. William A. Starrett (1877-1932), an engineer, builder and architect, acknowledged the effect of the zoning law in his 1928 book, a short history of the skyscraper and related topics, and said it gave "to architectural design in high buildings the greatest impetus it ever has known and to produce a new and beautiful pyramidal

skyline" Starrett, *Skyscrapers and the Men Who Build Them* (New York, 1928), 101.

25. Willis, 57.

26. This section is also adapted from LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report* (New York, 1991). See also: Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York, 1975), passim; Vlack, passim.

27. Paul T. Frankl, *New Dimensions: The Decorative Arts of Today in Words & Pictures* (New York, 1928), 55-56, 61.

28. 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. Robinson and Bletter, 41.

29. Edgar Albright, "The New Jersey Bell Telephone Building as an Example of Modern Office Building Design," Illuminating Engineering Society, *Transactions* 25 (May, 1930), 485-88.

30. Foreword by Walker in R.W. Sexton, *American Commercial Buildings of Today* (New York, 1928). For more on his design theory in general, see "Architect Defends Mass Production in Art; Calls Machine's Limitations Same as Mind's," *NYT*, Sept. 21, 1930, p.30; and these works authored by Walker: "The Aesthetics of Efficiency," *Pencil Points* 18 (Mar., 1937), 181-82; "Good Design in Architecture," *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* (A.I.A.) 17 (May, 1952), 209-10; "The Changing Philosophy of Architecture," *Journal of the A.I.A.* 22 (Aug., 1954), 75-82; *The Fly in the Amber* (New York, 1957).

During the 1920s, examples of European Expressionism were published and circulated among American audiences through journals such as *Moderne Bauformen*. For the influence of this movement on American Art Deco, see: Vlack, 26; Robinson & Bletter, 54; Stern, 567.

31. "The Long Distance Building. 32 Sixth Avenue, New York" (AT&T Company, Archives; copy in the files of the LPC), 7. Another possible source of inspiration, though there is no documentation supporting this theory, could have been woven fabrics of the American Southwest. A glimpse at company publications during this period reveals a fascination with the Great Plains and Southwest regions of the United States.

32. AT&T, "Long Distance Headquarters Moved," *Headquarters Bulletin* 6, no. 5 (May 9, 1932), 1-2; "The Long Distance Building. 32 Sixth Avenue, New York" (AT&T Company Archives; copy in LPC files).

33. Corbett, "New Heights in American Architecture," *Yale Review* (1928), 696.

34. Europe, South America, the Far East, Australia, Egypt, several islands in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and ships at sea.

35. A long wave channel to England was serviced by a transmission station at Rocky Point, Long Island, and reception station in Maine. Four short wave channels to England, Bermuda, South America, and ships at sea were serviced by transmission stations at Lawrenceville and Ocean Gate, New Jersey, and reception stations at Netcong and Forked River, New Jersey.

36. By the time of "The Long Distance Building" booklet, the commercial interconnection of broadcast stations, which had begun in 1923, had extended to about 45,000 miles of special telephone circuits and about 25,000 miles of telegraph and teletypewriter wires also needed by the stations.

37. "The Long Distance Building," 24. This conception of a skyscraper was central to Walker's philosophy of tall buildings. See George W. Gray, "The Future of the Skyscraper," *NYT Magazine*, Sept. 13, 1931, sect. 5, pp.1-2, 12.

38. See the chart in AT&T, "Quick Facts," *Long Lines* (May, 1932), 5.

39. Some sources give 5000 as the number of workers.

40. The barefoot woman, who is wearing a tunic and a pointed cap over flowing hair, appears to be an ancient figure, while her counterpart sports a modern haircut, a fringed robe, and high-heeled shoes.

41. Laura Abbott, AT&T media relations manager, in a telephone conversation in June, 1991. The LPC received valuable assistance in preparing this report from both AT&T and New York Telephone.

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 Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company first floor interior consisting of the Sixth Avenue entrance vestibule with its auditorium alcove, the Sixth Avenue lobby with its perpendicular elevator corridors, the Church Street corridor, the Church Street entrance vestibule with its alcove, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, floor surfaces, wall and ceiling surfaces including the mosaics, doors, elevator doors, and attached decorative elements; has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and the first floor 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 Long Distance Building first floor interior is a harmonious complement to the architectural character of the building's exterior, reflected in the use of rippled surfaces, linear ornament, and earth-colored materials; that the Long Distance Building, the world's largest long-distance communications center upon its completion in 1932, was designed by noted architect Ralph Walker as the last of his downtown Manhattan skyscrapers built for the communications industry; that the first floor lobby features an iconographic program that clearly and artfully broadcasts the building's significance as a hub of international communication; that this interior also displays a linear decorative motif which symbolizes the great distances spanned by the telephone lines and radio waves channeled through this operations facility; that the first floor interior -- appointed with a terrazzo floor, ceramic iron-spot wall tiles with bronze details, and multi-hued glass mosaic tiles -- is articulated in an Art Deco aesthetic, an especially appropriate treatment given the building's associations with technology; and that the first floor lobby remains largely intact in form, finish, and function as the gateway to an important center of communications.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21), of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company first floor interior consisting of the Sixth Avenue entrance vestibule with its auditorium alcove, the Sixth Avenue lobby with its perpendicular elevator corridors, the Church Street corridor, the Church Street entrance vestibule with its alcove, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, floor surfaces, wall and ceiling surfaces including the mosaics, doors, elevator doors, and attached decorative elements; 32 Sixth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its Landmarks Site Manhattan Tax Map Block 192, Lot 1.

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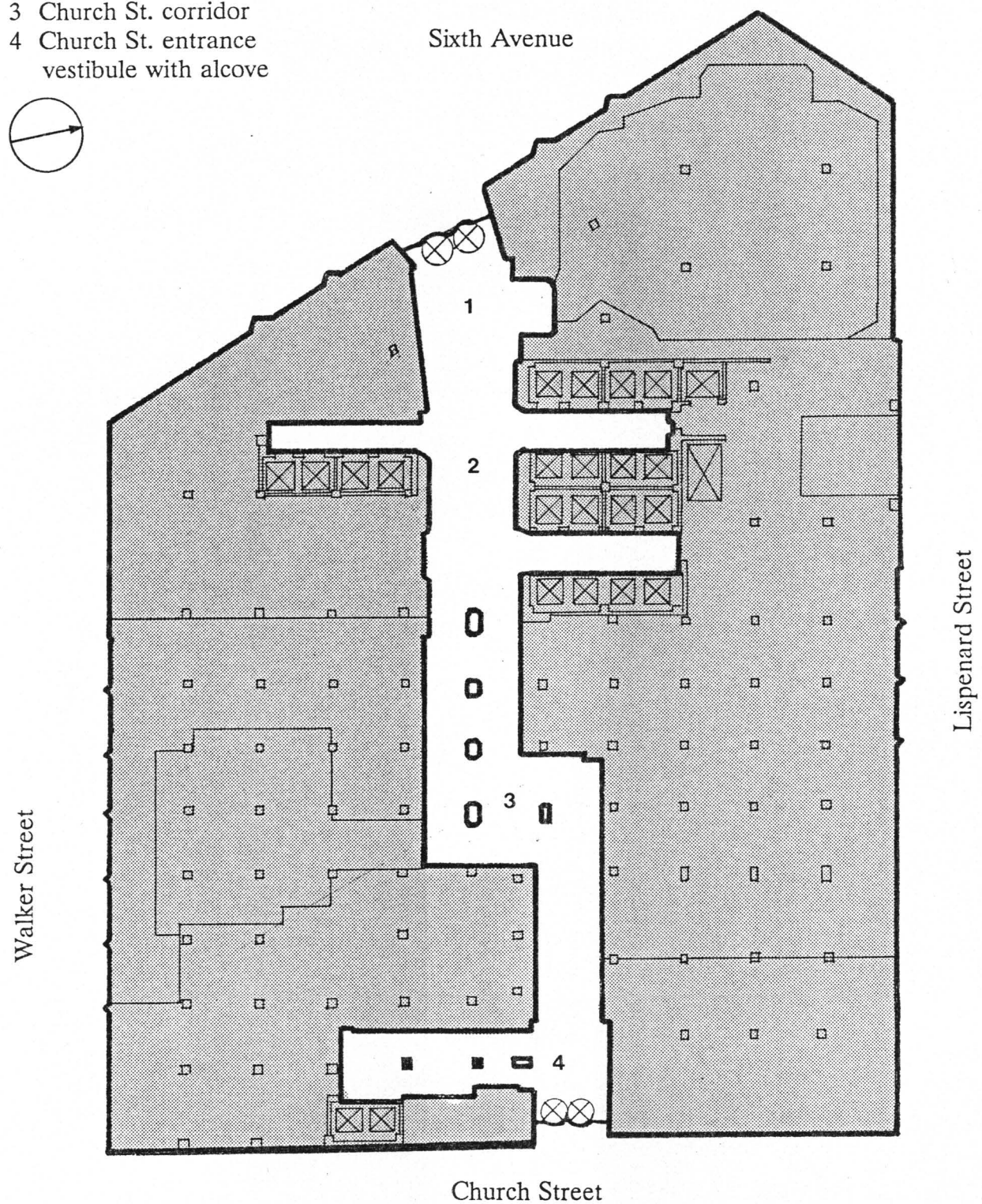
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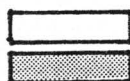
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- 1 Sixth Ave. entrance vestibule
- 2 Sixth Ave. lobby
- 3 Church St. corridor
- 4 Church St. entrance vestibule with alcove



Designated Area
Undesignated Area



October 1, 1991

Fig. 2: LONG DISTANCE BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR
32 Sixth Avenue



Fig. 3: Sixth Avenue entrance vestibule

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Fig. 4: Sixth Avenue lobby

The Long Distance Building, First Floor Interior, 32 Sixth Avenue

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Fig. 5: Church Street corridor

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Fig. 6: Church Street corridor and entrance vestibule

The Long Distance Building, First Floor Interior, 32 Sixth Avenue

Photo credit: Carl Forster

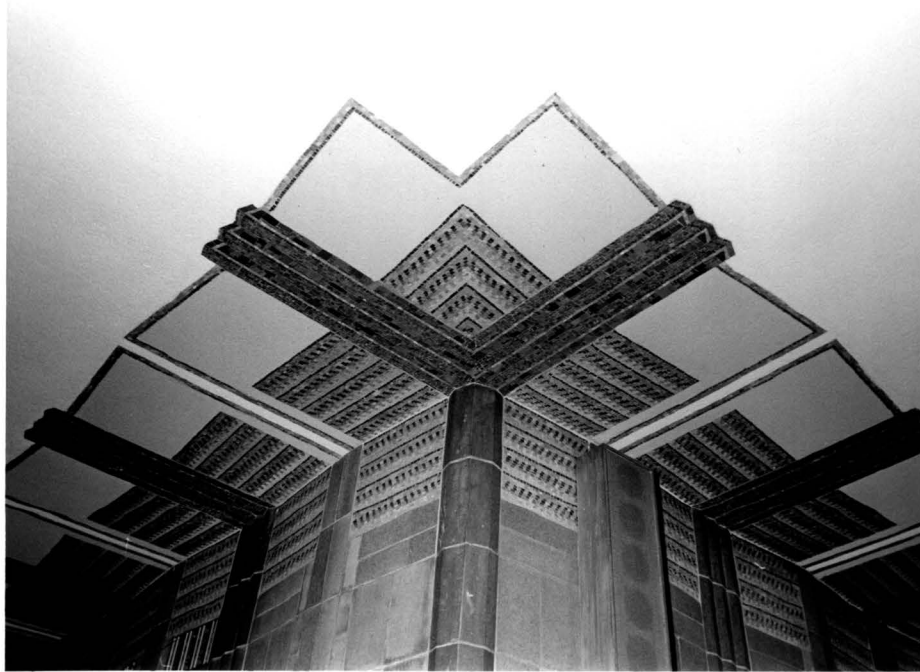


Fig. 7: Tile and mosaic pattern

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Fig. 8: Typical wall and door treatment

The Long Distance Building, First Floor Interior, 32 Sixth Avenue

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Fig. 9: "Australia"

Photo credit: Carl Forster

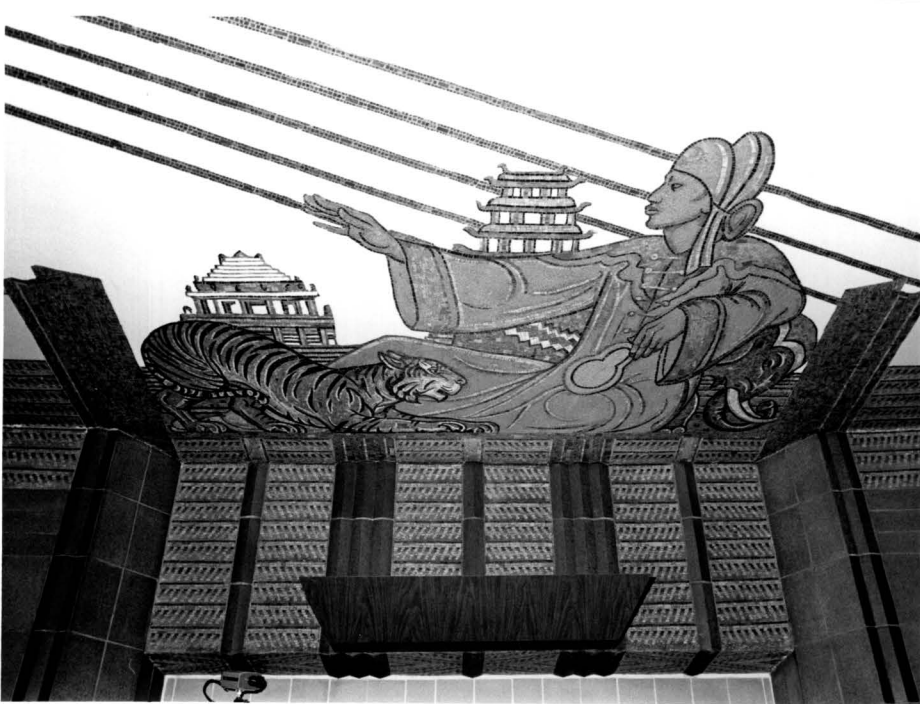


Fig. 10: "Asia"

Photo credit: Carl Forster

Details of ceiling mosaics
The Long Distance Building, First Floor Interior, 32 Sixth Avenue



Fig. 11: "Africa"

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Fig. 12: "Europe"

Photo credit: Carl Forster

Details of ceiling mosaics
The Long Distance Building of AT&T, 32 Sixth Avenue



Fig. 13: "Winged messengers"

Photo credit: Carl Forster

Detail of ceiling mosaics
The Long Distance Building, First Floor Interior, 32 Sixth Avenue