

Landmarks Preservation Commission
June 7, 1988; Designation List 204
LP-1557

TRINITY BUILDING, 111 Broadway, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1905, 1907; architect Francis Hatch Kimball.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 49, Lot 2.

On November 12, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Trinity Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 12). The hearing was continued to December 10, 1985 (Item No. 4). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. One witness spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received three letters in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Trinity Building, designed by Francis Hatch Kimball and built in 1905, with an addition of 1907, is among the first Gothic-inspired skyscrapers in New York. Kimball's sensitive adaptation of this historical style establishes a sympathetic relationship between the skyscraper and its early Gothic Revival neighbor, Trinity Church and Churchyard. An entirely freestanding, steel-framed structure, the Trinity Building anticipates the skyscraper "cathedral" tower type which emerged just a few years later--of which the Woolworth Building is the most notable example. The spire of Trinity Church, the picturesque rooflines of the Trinity Building, its companion, the U.S. Realty Building, and the Woolworth Building tower form a romantic ensemble and create a striking, Gothic silhouette on Lower Broadway. Kimball, who had worked with the English Victorian Gothicist William Burges, had won acclaim as a designer of theaters and churches before receiving several important skyscraper commissions at the turn of the century; these tall buildings are known for their important innovations in the technology of caisson foundations. His strong predilection for Gothic design and his engineering expertise made Kimball the ideal architect for the Trinity Building commission.

Development of Lower Manhattan

Since the seventeenth century, Lower Manhattan has been New York's center of commerce and finance. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, many major American businesses had established headquarters there,¹ and by the early twentieth century, the skyline of Lower Manhattan had been dramatically transformed as the early skyscrapers appeared. The advancement of elevator technology and new developments in structural engineering allowed architects to construct tall, spacious, and efficient office buildings, suited to the narrow sites of the island.² In the 1880s and 1890s, Broadway became the main artery of the district.³ Insurance companies, conscious of their public images, were among the first to erect structures celebrating their wealth and prosperity. In 1898, the five

boroughs were consolidated into Greater New York, awakening a strong awareness of the city's history and a sense of civic pride on the part of the general public. At this time, there was also a growing mistrust of monopolies and big business practices were severely criticized. Large corporations attempted to counter such sentiments by erecting buildings that would give an impression of not merely financial stability but of trustworthiness, tradition, and integrity, in order to imply that big business served the needs of the public.⁴

As this new building type emerged, so did the need for appropriate stylistic and compositional expression. Architects found solutions in a variety of historical styles, but none was more pervasive than classicism. The classical, tripartite division of the elevation into a base, a shaft, and a capital was widely accepted, in part because it could accommodate the large proportions of skyscrapers; the neo-Classical style was commonly employed for civic architecture, thus providing, by association, a positive image for the corporation.⁵

The Neo-Gothic Style

Although the Gothic Revival was influential in the United States during the nineteenth century, the style was rarely employed for commercial architecture and early skyscraper designs. Contemporary architectural criticism focused on the notion that no single historical style could accommodate the variety of building types demanded by modern life, and until "a distinct system of architectural forms appropriate to our age and civilization" was found, historical styles should co-exist.⁶ Despite the acceptance of stylistic variation, Gothic was generally not considered to be relevant to the design of office buildings,⁷ prior to the erection of the Woolworth Building, (Cass Gilbert, 1911-13, a designated New York City Landmark). Although few, the early, Gothic-inspired skyscrapers were massive, stylistically innovative structures which proved to have a great impact on Manhattan's skyline. In addition to the Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings, other outstanding examples of Neo-Gothic skyscraper design are Gilbert's West Street Building, (1905); Kimball's enormous City Investing Building, (1908, demolished); and the Liberty Tower by Henry Ives Cobb, (1909, a designated New York City Landmark).

The subjective connotations of the Gothic style--spirituality, scholasticism, fraternity, craftsmanship--seem to have little to do with an architecture of capitalism. As the "Commerical Gothic" developed, however, critics made formal, stylistic comparisons between the verticality and thrust of Gothic cathedrals, (particularly their spires), and skyscrapers. Due to their location next to the early Gothic Revival Trinity Church, a sense of place and the picturesque qualities of the Gothic style were decisive factors in Kimball's choice of this style for the Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings.

Both buildings have very narrow sites; they were therefore limited to twenty-one stories each, due to the proportion of elevator area to floor area. Although the upper stories and the parapets of both buildings create a cathedral-like effect, the treatment of the curtain wall of the intermediate stories does not stress the verticality of the piers as it does in Gilbert's West Street Building or his later Woolworth Building. It was considered essential, rather, that the Trinity Building relate

aesthetically to its neighbor and namesake, Trinity Church.

The design of the Trinity Building was highly praised for its sensitivity to the site in contemporary accounts, for it not only harmonizes with the style of the church, but adjusts such compositional features as the decorative ornament and the arcaded windows of the lower stories to comparably scaled proportions. The site, previously occupied by Richard Upjohn's Trinity Building, (1853), was "long regarded as one of the most attractive [not to mention valuable] parcels in the city for office building construction" due to the exposure to light and air guaranteed by its location adjacent to the churchyard.⁸ Giles Edgerton, writing in The Craftsman, extols the picturesque possibilities of the skyscraper type, making reference to the Trinity Building without identifying it:

...[the skyscraper's] charm must always depend on its environment....It needs the Old Gothic Church with its slender spire, the hoary churchyard...to fold about it, to rest near it and connect it with the earth.⁹

Montgomery Schuyler described the Trinity Building's southern elevation, (along with the northern elevation of Kimball & Thompson's Empire Building, just south of the church), as "counterparting frontages" embracing Trinity Church, which have the "effect of framing and protecting the relic."¹⁰ And The New York Times states:

...[the Trinity Building] rears its head over the very spot around which the most sacred American traditions hover: It looks out upon Trinity Churchyard...It is more than an office building, it is a monument, a gigantic milestone marking the advance of ideas.¹¹

Gothic styling, therefore, provided Kimball with a means to synthesize commercialism with a sensitivity to the city's historical past, in line with the current of civic pride.

Francis Hatch Kimball (1845-1919)

Francis Hatch Kimball, a devoted and prolific Gothic Revivalist, participated in the evolution of neo-Gothic design from a High English Victorian to an American modern, commercial style. He is also noted for making important structural innovations that furthered the development of the skyscraper.

Kimball was first employed by a Massachusetts relative as a carpenter's apprentice. In his early career, he managed the Hartford office of the Boston firm of Rogers & Bryant. While in Hartford, Trinity College appointed him as a "superintending" architect, with G.W. Keller, for their new buildings (1873-82), designed by the English architect, artist and theorist, William Burges, (1827-81). Before construction began on Trinity College, Kimball traveled to England, visiting medieval churches and consulting with Burges over the commission. Burges's High Victorian Gothic aesthetic and his particular interest in thirteenth century French Gothic architecture made a lasting impression on Kimball.

In 1879, he moved to New York and soon formed a partnership with the

English-born architect Thomas Wisedell--also a student of the Gothic style--which lasted until Wisedell's death in 1884. They were especially active in theater design. Apart from a brief partnership with Henry S. Ihnen during the year 1886, Kimball practiced alone until 1892. In this period, he designed the Catholic Apostolic Church on West 57th Street in the neo-Gothic style, the Emmanuel Baptist Church in Brooklyn, (a designated New York City Landmark), in an early French Gothic mode, and the Venetian Gothic Montauk Club in the Park Slope Historic District. These buildings are notable for their use of terra-cotta ornament. Kimball formed a partnership with George Kramer Thompson in 1882, and terra cotta became a hallmark of their designs.

Although each had backgrounds in theater, residential, and ecclesiastical design, Kimball and Thompson also became prominent and pioneering designers of tall commercial structures. Their Manhattan Life Insurance Building, (1893), was the first New York skyscraper fully framed in iron and steel and set on concrete caissons that were sunk to the bedrock using an ingenious pneumatic process, which allowed the foundation to be set in place without disturbing the sandy soil of Manhattan. Kimball & Thompson also designed the Empire Building, and the Francois I style Gertrude Rhinelanders Waldo Mansion (1895-98, a designated New York City Landmark). The Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings, the massive City Investing Building, and the Adams Express Building were the work of Kimball alone.¹²

The Construction

"Twin examples of Gothic splendor,"¹³ the Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings were originally conceived as freestanding office buildings to be erected simultaneously. Due to delays in securing the sites, they were actually built two years apart and not as identical structures. The commissions were awarded to Francis Kimball by the highly successful United States Realty and Construction Company. The project called for speculative office space, although the sponsoring corporation also planned to maintain their headquarters in the U.S. Realty Building.

The United States Realty and Construction Company was incorporated in 1901. It then acquired a large percentage of the George A. Fuller Company, (general contractor for these commissions), and the well-established New York Realty Corporation, among other holdings. The corporation was formed in order to consolidate real estate investments and make new building contracts through the George A. Fuller Company.

In 1902, the old Trinity Building was purchased from the Fearing estate and Frederick Ayer of Boston by the U.S. Realty Company in conjunction with the Lawyers Title Insurance Company.¹⁴ The old building was constructed in 1853 and designed in the Romanesque Revival Style by Richard Upjohn, architect of Trinity Church. Although it had no elevator and was only five stories tall, it was an enormous office building for its time, occupying the entire lot. Without steam heat, it was also the only large office building in New York with an open fireplace in each room. It had housed the famous "Exchange Salesroom," used for real estate auctions and coal sales.¹⁵ Upjohn, Charles C. Haight, J.C. Cady and H.H. Richardson were among several prominent architects who once had offices in this building, where the American Institute of Architects was founded in 1857.

In order to attain maximum exposure to light for both skyscrapers with a minimum of interior offices, it was planned that the Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings would be erected on equal, full-block sites, each with narrow frontages on Broadway and Trinity Place, and with long side elevations. To secure equal sites, however, municipal consent was needed to move the existing Thames Street approximately twenty-eight feet to the north, and to permanently close Temple Street which then ran between Thames and Cedar Streets, bisecting the site of the U.S. Realty Building. Thames Street was originally a carriageway to the stables of Etienne De Lancey, a Huguenot, who lived on the corner of Broad and Pearl Streets in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁶ The city granted these changes, with the condition that Thames Street be widened from twenty-five to thirty feet.¹⁷ Erected prior to the 1916 zoning resolution, there was no provision that the slabs include setbacks in order to allow for more light on narrow Thames Street.

The foundations of the Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings were set using the acclaimed pneumatic caisson process which Kimball & Thompson had introduced in the Manhattan Life Building. In the Trinity Building, fifty caissons were sunk to a depth of eighty-five feet below the Broadway curb, causing Real Estate Record and Guide to state that "these will probably be the deepest foundations ever put down in New York."¹⁸ Another interesting aspect in the construction of the Trinity Building was that precautions were taken to safeguard the consecrated churchyard. Materials, tools and workers circulated around the structure on cantilevered scaffolds.¹⁹ Originally, a temporary wall was built on the north side of the Trinity Building in anticipation of the approximately twenty-eight foot addition which was built in 1907, after Thames Street was moved. Not only did the Trinity Building and its companion set world records for rapidity of construction, but they were also considered to be the "costliest business structures ever," together totalling fifteen million dollars, including land.²⁰

Description

The Trinity Building is a freestanding, twenty-one story slab, clad in Bedford, Indiana limestone. The building extends the full length of the block between Broadway and Trinity Place, and is bounded to the south by cTrinity Churchyard, and to the north by Thames Street. Overall, the building has a tripartite division in elevation. It was Kimball's aim "to produce a broad effect in stone, in one plane, unbroken by vertical lines of projection, depending for the architectural effect on the three divisions, base, shaft and capital; the shaft relieved by groupings of windows into features richly treated."²¹

The building has a shallow water-table of polished pink granite. On the north side, a basement of unpolished granite increases in height as the site slopes downward eleven feet between Broadway and Trinity Place. The southern elevation is on grade with the elevated churchyard. The Trinity Place elevation has a one-story granite basement.

Early drawings of the Trinity Building illustrated in The New York Times and Real Estate Record and Guide show six-story towers atop the Broadway and Trinity Place elevations which were never built.²² In 1907, an addition 27.5 feet wide was erected along the north side of the

building, where the former Thames Street had been. A domed, copper cupola on an elaborate, polygonal base ornamented with projecting gargoyles and finials surmounts the addition at the north end of the Broadway facade. This addition forms a three-sided angled corner on Broadway and Thames Street, with a door at its base, which gives the impression that this narrow portion of the facade is an adjoined tower, creating an asymmetrical composition.

The main, Broadway facade features a recessed, basket-arched entrance portal reached by seven, broad steps with granite cheeks. The portal is open; the original entrance door has been removed. The grand portal has pointed, engaged buttresses ornamented with eagles and winged dragons at either side, and a dentilled cornice crowned by a framed shield containing stars and stripes within a stepped pediment. The cornice continues around the building as a molded stringcourse, similar to those marking the fifth, eighth, fourteenth, and eighteenth stories, horizontally balancing the verticality of the building. Flanking the entrance are pointed-arched niches and large, basket-arched windows. The transoms of these windows have bronze tracery and stained glass, and the transom of the portal has a decorative bronze grille supported on winged dragon brackets. The window to the south of the doorway is also flanked by buttresses, and surmounted by a Gothic balustrade. Below this bay is an entrance to the subway, which is original. The window to the north of the doorway forms part of the 1907 addition. Several windows in the angled bay are fronted with balustrades; others have dentilled sills.

The original portion of the Broadway facade has a three-story, gabled bay centered above the south window and the entrance. The bay contains three, rectangular windows, continued visually above a stone balustrade by double-height, pointed-arched windows. Bundled piers topped with engaged, Gothic finials outline the bays and give an undulating effect to the wall surface. This major bay is identical to bays on the the southern and Trinity Place elevations, which together articulate the base of the building.

The four-story base of the southern side elevation features an arcade of single- and double-height basket-arched windows, with paired, rectangular "clerestory" windows above. This compositional system recalls the interior nave elevation of a medieval church, and relates in scale to Trinity Church. Bays alternate with thin, bundled piers, topped with ornate, engaged finials. Employed in the arched windows are Perpendicular Style bronze tracery and infill panels, as well as stained glass. Tall, gabled bays, (described above, matching those on the Broadway and Trinity Place facades), are bracketed by busts of armored figures and flank the arcade. The pointed gables intersect a dentilled cornice capping the base.

The thirteen-story shaft, on all three major elevations, is punctuated by bays of paired, rectangular windows with simple sills. The original one over one, double-hung sash windows are copper or bronze kalamein. Alternating bays have Gothic details: inscribed arches with decorative shields at the sixth story, blind tracery at the ninth story; balustrades at the eighth story; and pointed gables at the fifteenth story. Decorative moldings, and figurative finials and bosses add texture to the flat treatment of the wall surface. The shaft is terminated by a row of Gothic brackets supporting a dentilled cornice with gargoyles at the corners.

The upper portion or "capital" of the elevation features an arcade of double-height, basket-arched windows containing bronze infill panels and tracery in the transoms, alternating with pointed, engaged buttresses. End bays, continuing the gabled bays of the base, have triple-height Gothic windows framed with fretwork and are surmounted by high, stepped parapets with ribbed panels which form tower-like terminations to the roofline, matched by those on the Broadway and Trinity Place facades.

The Trinity Place facade, though much narrower than the southern elevation, has the same general bay articulation, with two major bays rising from base to crown. The entrance is much less elaborate than that of the primary facade, consisting of a simple rectangular opening in the granite base. A bronze door with tracery in the transom is located on the second story, indicating that this original entrance was reached by a flight of steps. The Thames Street elevation is comparatively unarticulated, apart from one-bay returns from the Broadway and Trinity Place ends.

In 1912, a footbridge was erected across Thames Street approximately midway between Broadway and Trinity Place, joining the roofs of the Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings. Designed by Kimball, the bridge has steel framing and ornamental wrought iron panels with a quatrefoil pattern.

Since its completion, the Trinity Building has continued in use as commercial office space. Restoration and refurbishment of the interior lobby is currently underway, and a program is planned for the exterior restoration, including cleaning and the removal of later alterations.

Conclusion

Once a very tall building in Lower Manhattan, the Trinity Building is now surrounded by many taller structures, although its unique site adjacent to Trinity Church ensures its visual prominence on Broadway, enriched as well by its complementing neighbor, the U.S. Realty Building. The unusual Gothic style and picturesque roof of the Trinity Building distinguish it from its downtown neighbors, making it an important visual landmark in the financial district.

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NOTES

1. Works Progress Administration, New York City Guide, (1939; rpt. New York, 1970), 58-60. See also Andrew S. Dolkart, Lower Manhattan Architectural Survey Report, (New York, 1988), intro., and "Large Corporations Moving to New York," Real Estate Record and Guide, 66, No. 1709 (Dec. 15, 1900), 822.
2. For a survey of the development of skyscraper construction, see Carl W. Condit, American Building Art: The Nineteenth Century, (New York, 1960), chpt. 2, and Winston Weisman, "A New View of Skyscraper History," in Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., ed., The Rise of an American Building Architecture, (New York, 1970), 115-60. For a contemporary account, see "Modern Office Buildings," Architects' and Builders' Magazine, 8, No. 9 (Jun., 1907), 413-47.
3. Dolkart, intro., and "Skyscraper Builders in a Gigantic Race," RER&G, 77, No. 1998 (Jun. 30, 1906), 1237.
4. Kenneth Turney Gibbs, Business Architectural Imagery in America, 1870-1930, (Ann Arbor, MI, 1984), 93-121, and Robert A.M. Stern, et al, New York 1900, (New York, 1983), 17-18.
5. Stern, 19-21, and Gibbs, 95-8. Examples include Bruce Price's American Surety Building, (1894-96), and Kimball & Thompsons' Manhattan Life (1893-94), and Empire (1898) buildings.
6. A.D.F. Hamlin, "The Battle of the Styles," Architectural Record, 1 (Apr.-Jun., 1892), 412.
7. M.S. [Montgomery Schuyler?], "Is Gothic Dead?" and "Gothic Revivals," AR, 19 (Jan., 1906), 66-7. For the opinion that Gothic Revival had failed, see A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City during the Last Quarter of a Century, (1898; rpt. New York, 1967), 558-70.
8. "Famous Trinity Building to Go After Fifty Years," The New York Times, (Nov. 11, 1902), p. 32, and "Big Twin Skyscrapers for Lower Broadway," (May 14, 1904), p. 9.
9. Giles Edgerton, "How New York has Redeemed Herself from Ugliness--An Artist's Revelation of the Beauty of the Skyscraper," The Craftsman, 11 (1906-07), 469.
10. Montgomery Schuyler, "Some Recent Skyscrapers," AR, 22, No. 3 (Sept., 1907), 162-63.
11. "New York's Newest Downtown Skyscraper," NYT, (Jun. 4, 1905), mag. sect., p. 7.
12. LPC, Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report, (New York, 1981), 1275-7. See also Montgomery Schuyler, "The Works of Francis H. Kimball," AR, 7 (Apr.-Jun., 1898), 479-518; A History of Real Estate, 479-481, 698; Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, (New York, 1982), 565-6; and Withey and Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American

Architects (Deceased), (Los Angeles, 1970), 343-4.

13. NYT, (Oct. 6, 1907), pt. 5, p. 3.
14. "Rumored Resale of the Trinity Building," NYT, (Feb. 14, 1903), p. 16, and "Trinity Building to be Reconveyed," (Nov. 24, 1903), p. 16. In 1903, the building was resold to the Equitable Life Assurance Company, then reconveyed to the U.S. Realty Company in the same year.
15. "Famous Trinity Building to Go."
16. Gerald R. Wolfe, New York: A Guide to the Metropolis, (New York, 1975), 9.
17. "Streets to be moved for Skyscrapers," NYT, (May 22, 1904), p. 14.
18. RER&G, (Feb. 20, 1904), 383.
19. "New Trinity Building," NYT, (Dec. 20, 1903), p. 19.
20. "Twin Skyscrapers on Broadway," NYT, (May 27, 1906), p. 16. See also Frederic Taber Cooper, et al, Rider's New York City, Freemont Rider, ed., 2nd ed., (New York, 1923), 177-78.
21. "Trinity and U.S. Realty Buildings," New York Architect, 2 (Mar., 1908), n.p.
22. NYT, (Dec. 20, 1903), p. 19, and RER&G, (Jun. 11, 1904), pl. 1436.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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 Trinity Building has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Trinity Building, built in 1905 and 1907, is among the first skyscrapers in New York designed in the neo-Gothic style; that it was designed by Francis Hatch Kimball, who was trained in the neo-Gothic style and worked with the highly acclaimed English Victorian architect and theorist, William Burges; that Kimball was also responsible for structural innovations that furthered skyscraper technology; that among the notable design features of the building is its sympathetic relationship to Trinity Church, with its southern elevation providing an important and harmonious backdrop to the graveyard, thereby enhancing one of New York's most important landmarks; that it has Gothic detailing in fine materials, including bronze tracery and stained glass, decorative moldings, finials and gargoyles; that it features picturesque massing at the roofline, including the elaborate copper cupola on the corner tower-like base; that its caisson foundations are a notable structural feature; that being entirely freestanding it is not only rare for its period, but also anticipates the emerging skyscraper "tower" type; that its design is also enhanced by the U.S. Realty Building, with which it forms a coherent pair; and that the Trinity Building continues to stand as an important visual landmark in Lower Manhattan.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Trinity Building, 111 Broadway, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 49, Lot 2, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Trinity Building, 1905 and 1907
111 Broadway

Architect: Francis Kimball
Photo credit: Carl Forster



Trinity Building
Southern elevation

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Trinity Building
Broadway facade, with the
U.S. Realty Building on the right

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Trinity Building
Detail, roofline with cupola

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Trinity Building
Detail, Broadway facade, upper stories

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Trinity Building
Detail, entrance on Broadway

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Trinity Building
Trinity Place elevation, with the
U.S. Realty Building on the left

Photo credit: Carl Forster



Trinity Building
Detail, southern elevation, window bay

Photo credit: Carl Forster