

THE LONG DISTANCE BUILDING OF THE AMERICAN TELEPHONE &
TELEGRAPH COMPANY

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
new facades added 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) and the proposed designation of the related
Landmark Site (Item No. 33). 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. The Commission has received a letter
in favor of designation from the Community Board in which the building is located. Subsequently, the owner
indicated it would not oppose designation.

Summary

The Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company was
designed by noted architect Ralph Walker, a specialist in the design of communications
buildings and partner in the office of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker; it is one of the largest
and best known of his buildings for that industry and is the last of his downtown Manhattan
skyscrapers. Offering upon its completion in 1932 "a range of communications activities not
to be seen elsewhere in the world," the building was actually the result of three major
building campaigns. Commissioned by telephone executive Union N. Bethell, the original
core -- called the Walker Lispenard Building -- was designed by Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz and
McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, Walker's predecessor firm. It was erected in 1911-14 and
enlarged by seven stories later in that decade. A massive alteration, commissioned by James
S. McCulloh and designed by Walker, was executed in 1930-32. The building's
polychromatic, rough-textured brick exterior, terminating in light-colored brick parapets,
champions the Art Deco style through its setbacks, overall sculpted quality, and linear
ornament; appropriately, this progressive, technologically-inspired aesthetic successfully
broadcasts the building's role in housing the technologically sophisticated equipment of a
critical American industry. Upon the completion of the alterations in 1932, the Long
Distance Building was the world's largest long-distance center; its huge concentration of
equipment made it a communication crossroads for long-distance telephone calls in the
Northeastern United States and all transoceanic calls, for the nationwide network of radio
broadcasting companies, and for teletypewriting and telephotography. The building retains
both its exterior architectural integrity and its significance to the communications industry.

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 New York's most prominent merchants -- including Peter Lorillard, the Roosevelt family, and Jeremiah Dimick -- bought property on the block. Some merchants converted the dwellings to business use; others replaced them with 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 A native of Indiana and alumnus of Hanover College, Bethell was employed by the Bell System, starting out with the New York and New Jersey Telephone Company in Brooklyn 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; in New York City, the number of phones skyrocketed from 10,000 in 1893 to 310,000 just fifteen years later. 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 through New York Telephone. 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. He served on the company's executive committee of the board of directors before retiring in 1938.

Construction of the Walker Lispenard and the 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 buildings on Block 192: three brick-faced store and loft structures at 18, 20, and 22-24 Lispenard Street; four stone-fronted store and loft structures at 18, 20, 22, and 24 Walker Street; and a three-story masonry dwelling at 26 Walker Street. These were replaced by the seventeen-story office building and telephone exchange, erected in 1911-14 and called the "Walker Lispenard Building." 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 building, which extended 125 feet along Walker Street (see fig. 2) and eighty-nine feet along Lispenard Street, is still visible, though its exterior has been altered. The eight-bay Walker Street facade and six-bay Lispenard Street facade were articulated in the Romanesque Revival style, consisting of a four-story base, a twelve-story midsection, and a one-story crown set off by terracotta cornices. Each base comprised a limestone-fronted first story beneath a three-story expanse of brick piers and spandrels united by arches above the fourth story. Each midsection and crown repeated the articulation established by the brick portion of the base. It was one of the largest buildings devoted solely to telephone service and included the country's largest long-distance switchboard. 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.

The building's foundations and steel skeleton

were prudently designed to accommodate additional 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. The exterior of the new twenty-third story was crowned by a cornice supported on brackets which framed the paired windows of that story. Surmounted by a cornice with acroteria, the twenty-fourth story appears to have had end bays aligned with the wall below and a recessed central section. 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 (see fig. 1).

The firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, the successor to the architectural firm that had produced the earlier telephone exchange on the site filed plans on behalf of the telephone company in September, 1929. 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; each extension has twenty-seven¹⁰ stories which are arranged with setbacks beginning at the sixteenth story. The existing structure and its new wings were unified by their exterior treatment and interior alterations.

Due to the complicated site conditions and the need to continue telephone service, the project

posed organizational problems. Demolition of the smaller structures on the western portion of the block began in April, 1930; construction of the western wing followed immediately and the erection of the steel skeleton started in October of that year. A photograph from March of the subsequent year reveals that the skeleton was complete and the brick exterior had risen half-way to the top. The site of the eastern wing was cleared beginning in February, 1931, and the steel was begun in June. Due to the presence of the existing building, the 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 the second long-distance operating center was put into operation. 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 The deepening economic depression necessitated the conservation and transfer of many furnishings from the former locations, which further complicated the move.

These extensive alterations were carried out by Marc Eidlitz & Son, a construction firm founded during the mid-nineteenth century by Marc Eidlitz (d. 1892), uncle of architect Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz, who was responsible for the erection of many other notable New York buildings. Workmanship on the Long Distance 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 bricklayer, the cement mason, the marble polisher, and the ornamental iron worker.¹²

The Architects of the Walker Lisperard Building

For the design of its Walker Lisperard Building, the New York Telephone Company chose Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz and his successor firm of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, whose partners had joined in practice in 1910.

The son of renowned New York architect Leopold Eidlitz, Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz¹³ (1853-1921) studied in Geneva and Stuttgart, then returned to the United States in 1871 and entered his father's practice. Establishing his own office in 1876, Cyrus designed buildings for sites in cities of the Great Lakes region, although he is best remembered for his New York City designs, which

include two telephone buildings¹⁴ (1885-86 and 1890) at downtown locations, the Western Electric Factory (1888-89) on Greenwich Street, and the Racquet and Tennis Club (1891, demolished) on West 43rd Street. Later in his career, he formed a partnership with Andrew McKenzie.

Andrew McKenzie (1861-1926),¹⁵ 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 their partnership was active until 1909. That firm's major work was the New York Times Building (1904) at Times Square. Stephen Voorhees (1878-1965)¹⁶ was born near Rocky Hill, New Jersey, and studied civil engineering at Princeton University. He worked in that capacity in Newark from 1900, the year of his graduation, until 1902. He then began to practice with Eidlitz and McKenzie as a civil 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)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.

The Architect of the Long Distance Building

For the transformation of its Walker Lisperard 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 (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 this building (1930-32). Walker also designed buildings for General Foods and IBM and several pavilions 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 & Waehler.

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.²¹ 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.

While the creators of the 1916 zoning law were motivated by purely practical concerns, some architects drew artistic inspiration from the building forms which resulted from the restrictions.²² 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 which illustrated progressive stages of design based on the law's restrictions.²³ Ferriss's dramatic renderings, published in *Pencil Points* (1923) and in his *Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929), significantly influenced architects of the day. 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."²⁴

The zoning law provided architects with a sound, rational basis for the form and appearance of the skyscraper and reinforced the idea that historical styles were not appropriate expressions of the modern sensibility. Progressive architects allowed the form and appearance of the building to be guided by the practical restrictions and considerations facing them and a new "skyscraper style" emerged in the 1920s,²⁵ which generated further interest as its peculiar American quality was realized. Major characteristics of the new style were sculpted massing, bold setbacks, and ornament subordinated to the overall mass.²⁶ Clearly reflecting the current interest of the designers, the new style was commonly called "modernistic." Corbett praised the new "setback style" and predicted it would "go down in history along with the Gothic, the Classic, and the Renaissance."²⁷ The dramatic rendering style of Ferriss and others expressed the new, vertically-oriented, modernistic aesthetic.

"Modernistic" Art Deco²⁸

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. 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 wrote of the powerful image of "Brick tapestries hung from the sky ..." being a "truly American" style of skyscraper that was a "monument of American business and enterprise."²⁹ Reaching its zenith in popularity between 1928 and 1931 in New York City, this new architectural style was used mainly for skyscrapers. By the time of its critical re-assessment in the 1960s and '70s the "modernistic" style had achieved the popular name of Art Deco.³⁰ An Art Deco skyscraper, generally speaking, is characterized by bold geometric massing emphasized by setbacks, ornament designed without historic allusions and executed in low relief, overall vertical emphasis, and often a polychromatic treatment.

Outstanding Art Deco design is often associated with Walker, among New York's foremost architects who interpreted the modernistic skyscraper style in unusually potent creations. While the buildings are united by their common verticality and stepped-back masses, these forms were influenced by diverse aesthetic models. An architect from Walker's firm explained in 1930 that the casting aside of traditional, classically-inspired forms was an attempt to express the modernity of the telephone industry.³¹ Walker's designs for the Barclay-Vesey Building and the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company Building (c. 1927-28, Newark) display a clear affinity for the organic themes popularized by various turn-of-the-century artistic movements and the latter's sculpted figures above the entrance are clearly related to the art of pre-Columbian America or the ancient Near East. 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."³² At the Long Distance

Building, the last of Walker's large operations facilities in downtown Manhattan, the architect was 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."³³ Although not commissioned by the communications industry, Walker's other Art Deco tower in downtown Manhattan, the glistening, limestone sheathed Irving Trust Building, completes his experiments in the design of Art Deco towers.

Design of the Long Distance Building

The design and execution of the enlarged building was an aesthetic achievement (see figs. 3-5) with a modulated mass that is typical of Art Deco skyscrapers. The northern and southern facades of the existing edifice, shorn of their historicizing embellishment, were incorporated into the mass of the new structure as two of many projecting volumes. Intersecting the original structure along an east-west axis and spanning above it, the large central slab of twenty-seven stories became a new backbone of the building. Smaller protrusions from the slab were arranged as buttresses in a stepped-back fashion. The existing floor levels determined those in the new building and the paired fenestration of the old facade appears to have influenced the northern, eastern, and southern facades of the new fabric. Walker's design for the Sixth Avenue facade established a wall of fifteen and sixteen stories with a boldly recessed entrance, a clear front along the diagonal axis line of lower Sixth Avenue and was dramatically juxtaposed to the orientation of the remainder of the building along the old street grid. Although the varying heights of the volumes of the new building were clearly derived from zoning constraints, their rotated juxtaposition was rooted in Walker's other designs for setback skyscrapers on irregular sites in downtown Manhattan, the Barclay-Vesey and Western Union Buildings. Walker obviously indulged his interest in treating the exterior surface as a brick curtain hung from the sky in which the modeled piers read as folds, the brick patterns as texture, and the two main entrances as proscenium-like openings, very much as he did in the exterior of the Western Union Building. Noted for his sensitive selection of materials, Walker chose for the Long Distance Building a distinctive blend of red, orange, gray, brown, and dark brown rough-textured bricks.

Structurally, the building was also innovative.

To house mechanical systems, three stories were added above the old structure by an inventive method. A ninety-foot-long steel truss was extended from the top of one new wing to the top of the other wing without resting on the original building. The truss was one of the largest ever erected at so great a height -- 450 feet -- and supported special light-weight concrete, employed to reduce the load. Among other novel features, the building received an air conditioning system. To accommodate the myriad of equipment (see below), the building required a power installation which was one of the largest found in any building in the city.

The Long Distance Building and the Communications Industry³⁴

Creating a communication hub such as this -- it was the world's largest long distance center -- was an extraordinary feat of organization. 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 locations³⁵ were handled there as well as all calls requiring the connection of two radio circuits (for example, Bermuda to Europe) via five separate channels.³⁶ 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.³⁷ The private lines (telephone, teletypewriter, or telegraph) used by the press and financial institutions were routed through the building.

Called a "small city,"³⁸ 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!).³⁹ To accommodate the 5,500 workers,⁴⁰ the number of passenger elevators was increased from the original four to thirty-two.

Description

Composed of volumes of varying heights, the building may be described as a brick mountain culminating in multi-faceted peaks or as a steel skeleton draped with a finely crafted brick curtain (see figs. 3-9). The first analogy is based on the clever juxtaposition of the mass of the original twenty-four-story building to the newer lower wings, some of which are oriented in the east-west plane and others along the diagonal of Sixth Avenue, and to the taller core of twenty-seven stories, which dominates the composition and even in part spans over the original building. The second analogy is fostered by the rippled quality of the rough-textured, multi-colored brick surfaces, continuous vertical lines, V-shaped piers, and patterned spandrels.

Many features unite the otherwise subtly complex exterior: a continuous polished Texas pink granite water table, vertical bands of brick, related fenestration patterns, and a faceted parapet of lighter-colored brick. The sections of the facade which date from the original building and its first enlargement are faced in red-brown brick. They have continuous V-shaped piers (apparently altered during the 1930-32 alteration) which flank bays with paired window openings. Most of the windows have six-over-six double-hung wood sash. Others have been replaced by metal louvers. Continuous brick mullions lend further articulation, except at the end bays of the older fabric. The vertical elements terminate in parapet bands of lighter-colored brick. The sections of the building dating from the 1930-32 alteration are faced in blended shades of brick from red to orange to gray, brown, and dark brown. There are a variety of brick textures, but much of the brick surface is coarse and the mortar joints are thicker

than in the earlier sections. The window openings vary between single and paired. Surviving windows are six-over-six double-hung steel sash with wire glass; some openings contain metal louvered vents. The lower parapets are terminated with horizontal bands of light-colored brick while the topmost parapet has stepped-back piers flanking paired chevron panels, also of light-colored brick. In addition to the prominent flagpole, the building's roof contains microwave transmitters and receivers and television and radio transmission equipment.

The west facade has a symmetrical base, its fifteen-story wings flanking a sixteen-story central section. The grand, proscenium-like main entrance opening features a bronze base, with two revolving doors and two pairs of auxiliary doors, and an imposing transom with a bronze grille protecting opaque glass. Modern light fixtures and signs have been added to the entrance. Painted metal doors cover an original entrance to the subway and a service entrance. An historic iron subway entrance survives adjacent to the facade. Behind the original metal frames of the first-story show windows, fixed aluminum-frame windows have been inserted. Two flagpoles have been added beneath the third story. Visible above the base are the western sides of twenty-one-story wings, twenty-four-story wings (originally part of the earlier building), and the core with its twenty-seven stories.

The south facade is dominated at its eastern side by the twenty-four-story section, which remains from the original building and therefore displays the original brickwork, although portions of the original four-story base were altered. The western side of this facade is composed of a series of setback sections with fifteen, twenty-one, and twenty-seven stories.

The east facade has its original twenty-four-story section at the southern side and setbacks of the newer section at the northern side. The recessed entrance is covered with a veneer of green marble panels set into a bronze frame; two bronze revolving doors are flanked by two pairs of

auxiliary doors. The AT&T logo has been added above the entrance. The show windows appear to retain their historic frames and large panes of glass, although recent aluminum mullions have been added behind the outer surface.

The north facade has the original twenty-four-story section (noticeable due to the different brick and mortar) near its center; this is flanked by fifteen- and twenty-one-story wings on both sides and surmounted by the tall core. At the base there is a vehicular entrance with a roll-down security gate. The chamfered elevation at the northwest corner resembles the adjacent fifteen-story sections.

Subsequent History

The exterior of the building remains largely as it was completed in 1932. Exterior alterations to the base of the building have been limited to modifications at the subway entrance on the Sixth Avenue facade and the application of AT&T signage near both entrances. One of the significant qualities of the building is its dual function as office space and a communications center. As technology in the field of communications has progressed, equipment has been added to the roof and regularly upgraded, while respecting the building's original design. This has enabled the building to retain its significance to the communications industry, accommodating AT&T's television and long-distance telephone operations, as well as departments such as sales and marketing, and some corporate offices. It is anticipated that rooftop equipment will continue to be upgraded on a regular basis.⁴¹

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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. As president of New York Telephone, McCulloh placed the last rivet during the construction of the Barclay-Vesey Building; see LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report*, report prepared by Margaret M.M. Pickart (New York, 1991), 20.

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; "Manhattan's Biggest Telephone Building," *Real Estate Record & Guide* (henceforth, *RER&G*) 87 (Feb. 4, 1911), 205; *RER&G* 87 (June 3, 1911), 1048; *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. The LPC is indebted to the firm of Haines, Lundberg & Waehler for permitting access to its collection of architectural drawings of the Walker Lisenard Building.

6. Alt 898-1914. See also *RER&G* 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 Lisenard Street, a six-story masonry structure designed by Gilbert A. Schellenger and erected in 1888-89; No. 26-28 Lisenard 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 *RER&G* 124 (Dec. 7, 1929), 43.

Elevation drawings submitted to the Department of Buildings (then the "Bureau of Buildings") in February, 1931, show twenty-four stories surmounted by three inhabitable stories -- penthouse, penthouse mezzanine,

and bulkhead levels (i.e., twenty-seven stories). Three additional levels at the top of the structure accommodate mechanical equipment. For simplicity's sake, this report refers to the building as having twenty-seven stories. However, the *Manhattan Land Book* notes that there are twenty-eight stories.

11. AT&T, "Moving Out and Moving In," *Long Lines* (May, 1932), 6-7.

12. Marc Eidlitz obituary, *American Architect and Building News* 36, no. 854 (1892), 77; *Vermilya-Brown Company, Inc. Builders* (New York, [1953]), n.p. (In 1938 the firm's name was changed to the Vermilya-Brown Company, Inc.) Other projects for which the firm was responsible include: the Astor Library, the Metropolitan Opera House, the Barclay-Vesey Building, the Western Union Building, the Irving Trust Bank Building, and the Cloisters. See also: "Awards for Workers on Telephone Annex," *NYT*, Oct. 18, 1931, sect. 11, p.2.

13. 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.

14. 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, it 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. Voorhees was president of the American Institute of Architects in 1936 and 1937, and chairman of the board of design, chief architect, and vice president of the New York World's Fair of 1939-40. As an engineer, he believed that architects should be closer to the processes of construction; he was a founder in 1921 and later president of the New York Building Congress.

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*.
21. Depending on the height district in which the building was located, a setback was required at a height which was equal to a factor of the width of the facing street. A line drawn from the middle of the street through a point at the top of the first setback formed the spatial envelope for the remainder of the building. These rules applied to seventy-five percent of the site; the remaining portion of the building site was unlimited in height, encouraging developers to assemble building sites to make tower construction more affordable, possibly even profitable.
22. 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.
23. 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 impact 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.
24. Corbett, "Architecture," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th ed., vol. 2 (Chicago, 1929), 275.
25. 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.
26. Willis, 57.
27. Willis, 55. (Quoted from "The Coming City of Setback Skyscrapers," *NYT*, Apr. 29, 1923, sect. 4, p.5.)
28. This section is also adapted from LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report*. See also: Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York* (New York, 1975), passim; Vlack, passim.
29. Paul T. Frankl, *New Dimensions: The Decorative Arts of Today in Words & Pictures* (New York, 1928), 55-56, 61.
30. 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.
31. Edgar Albright, "The New Jersey Bell Telephone Building as an Example of Modern Office Building Design," Illuminating Engineers Society, *Transactions* 25 (May, 1930), 485-88.
32. 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).

33. "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.
34. 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).
35. Europe, South America, the Far East, Australia, Egypt, several islands in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and ships at sea.
36. 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.
37. By the time of "The Long Distance Building. 32 Sixth Avenue, New York" 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.
38. "The Long Distance Building," 24. This conception of a skyscraper as a small city 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.
39. See the chart in AT&T, "Quick Facts," *Long Lines* (May, 1932), 5.
40. Some sources give 5000 as the number of workers.
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 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 Long Distance Building was designed by Ralph Walker, a specialist in the design of communications buildings, and is the last of his downtown Manhattan skyscrapers built for the communications industry; that it is the result of a massive alteration in 1930-32 to an existing building and was the world's largest long-distance communications center upon its completion; that its huge concentration of equipment made it a communication crossroads for telephone, teletypewriting, and telephotography; that its polychrome, rough-textured brick exterior embodies the Art Deco style through its setbacks, overall sculpted quality, and linear ornament; that this progressive technologically-inspired aesthetic successfully broadcasts the building's role in housing the technologically sophisticated equipment of a critical American industry; that the core of the building, erected by Walker's predecessor firm in 1911-14 as the Walker Lispenard Building and enlarged later that decade, remains partly visible, although altered to harmonize with the later portions of the structure; and that the Long Distance Building retains its exterior architectural integrity and its significance to the communications industry as an office and operations building.

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 a Landmark the Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, 32 Sixth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its Landmarks Site Manhattan Tax Map Block 192, Lot 1.

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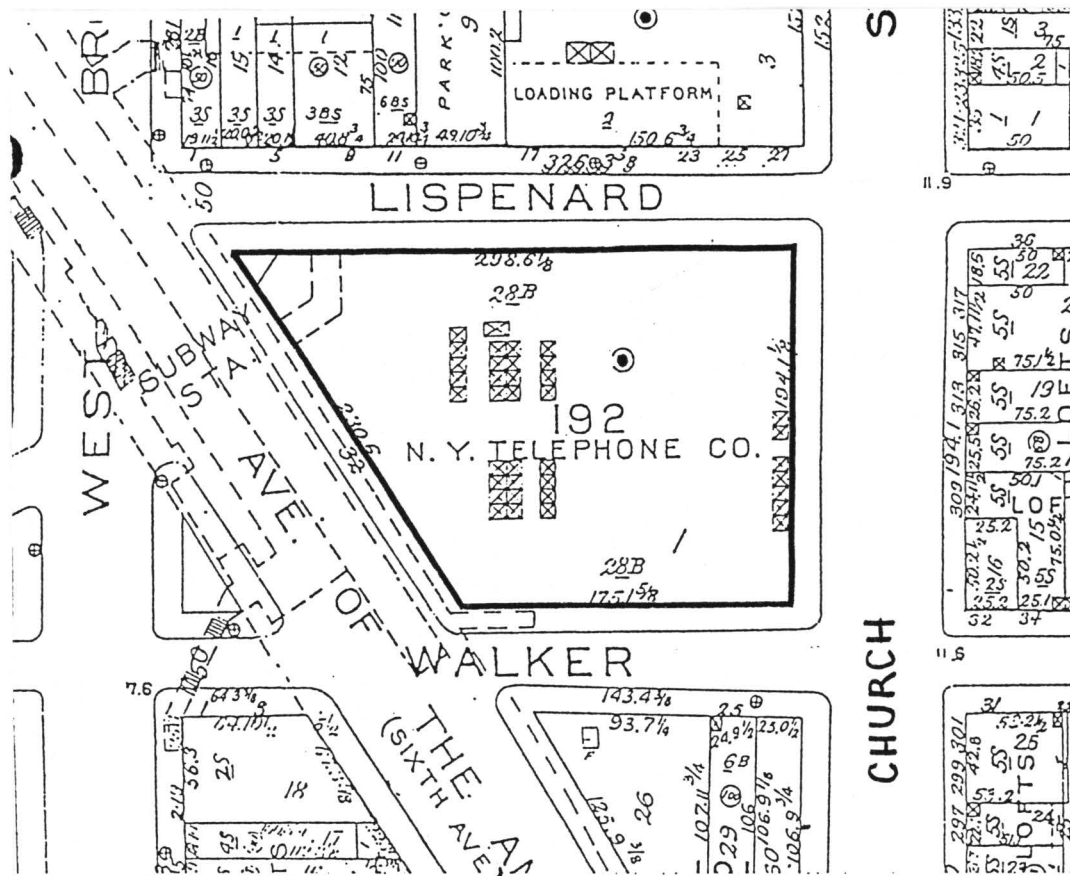


Fig. 1: Sanborn, Manhattan Land Book (1990-91), pl. 11

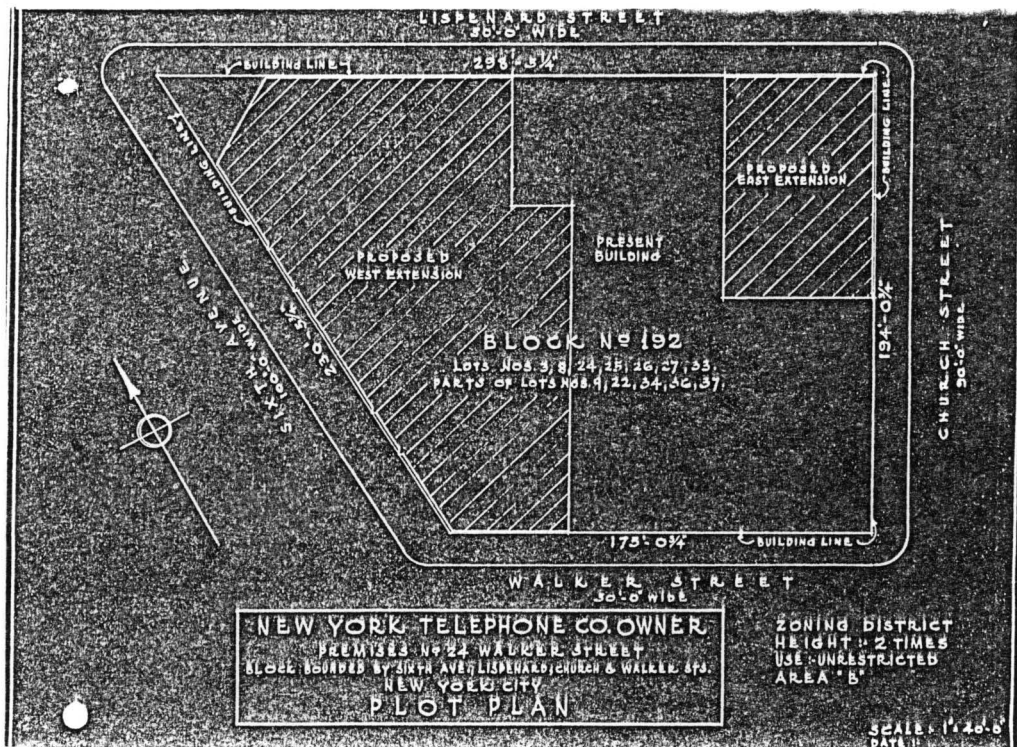


Fig. 2: Plot Plan submitted in 1930 showing Walker Lispenard Building and proposed extensions. NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets [Block 192]. Municipal Archives.

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



The Long Distance Building of AT&T, 32 Sixth Avenue
Fig. 3: Walker Street facade

Photo credit: DMB



The Long Distance Building of AT&T, 32 Sixth Avenue
Fig. 4: Sixth Avenue facade

Photo credit: DMB



The Long Distance Building of AT&T, 32 Sixth Avenue
Fig. 5: Lispenard Street and Sixth Avenue facades

Photo credit: DMB

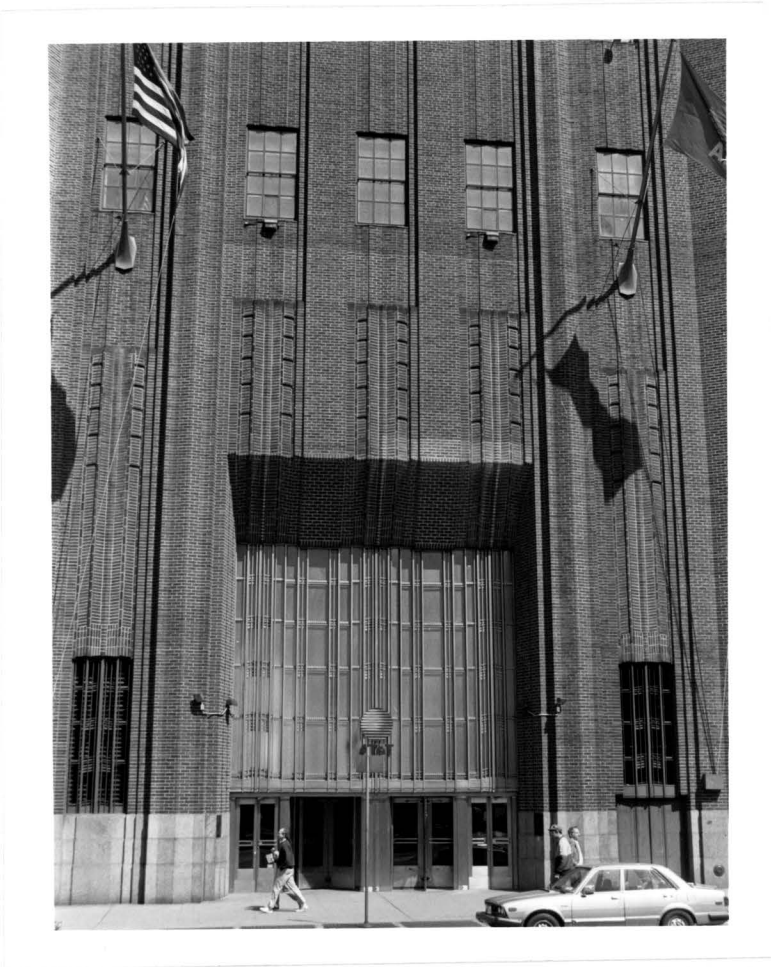


Fig. 6: Sixth Avenue entrance

Photo credit: DMB



Fig. 7: Church Street entrance

Photo credit: DMB

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

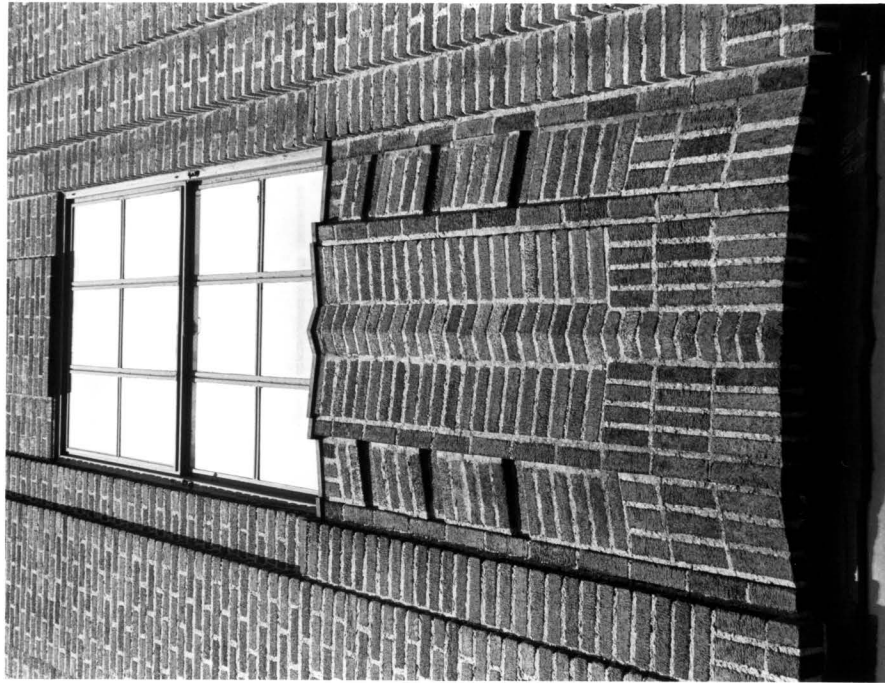


Fig. 8: Window and spandrel detail

Photo credit: DMB



Fig. 9: Oblique view of "curtain" wall

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

Photo credit: DMB