

**PANHELLENIC TOWER** (now the Beekman Tower Hotel), 3 Mitchell Place (aka 1-7 Mitchell Place, 876-880 First Avenue), Manhattan. Hotel built 1927-28, apartment annex built 1928-29; John Mead Howells, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1361, Lot 1.

On September 16, 1997, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Panhellenic Tower, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 9). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the New York Landmarks Conservancy and Municipal Art Society. A representative of the owner indicated that the owner was not opposed to designation. There were no speakers in opposition to this designation. The Commission has received a statement in support of the designation from Manhattan Community Board Six.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

Prominently sited at the top of Beekman Hill, the Panhellenic Tower (now the Beekman Tower Hotel) is one of the great Art Deco skyscrapers in Midtown Manhattan. Erected in 1927-29 as a residence and clubhouse for women belonging to national Greek-letter college sororities, the Panhellenic Tower provided affordable housing for young college-educated women who were entering the work force in record numbers in the 1920s. Designed by the noted architect John Mead Howells, this striking modernistic building features a square-plan twenty-six story tower with chamfered corners and setbacks. The tower is renowned for its dramatic volumetric massing and bold vertical striping created by deeply recessed window-and-spandrel bays set between narrow piers which rise unbroken from a two-story base to a parapet crown. Though sparsely decorated, the building incorporates handsome Gothic-inspired Art Deco ornament by the leading architectural sculptor Rene Chambellan.



## Description and Analysis

### The Panhellenic House Project

In the period following World War I, the number of women attending college began to approach that of men for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the graduates of the preceding generation, three-quarters of whom had intended to become teachers, the majority of women attending college in the 1920s planned on careers in business, the social sciences, or the professions. Nearly every woman student expected to obtain a job upon graduation, and many intended to move to urban centers where the career opportunities were greatest.

Young women choosing to settle in New York, however, faced a major housing shortage. War-time rent controls and inflation had brought housing construction to a standstill.<sup>3</sup> Apartments were difficult to find and generally too costly for young women just establishing their careers. Alternative housing choices such as boarding houses and hotels usually gave preferential treatment to men. By 1915, there were also about fifty-four organized, non-commercial homes for self-supporting women, but most of these were charitable institutions serving recent immigrants and working-class women.

Thus, in 1921 the year-old, 3,000 member, New York Chapter of the Panhellenic Association proposed to erect a clubhouse to provide permanent and temporary living accommodations for students and working women. A committee investigated what other associations and clubs had done in providing housing for their members and friends. Two clubs, the Bryn Mawr Club and the Smith Club, and two YWCAs, the Judson Memorial Home in Brooklyn and the Tatham House in Manhattan, had long waiting lists. The committee came to the conclusion that "there was more to be lost by building too small than too large"<sup>4</sup> and therefore proposed to build a fourteen-story building with two floors of public and club rooms and bedrooms to accommodate 400-500 guests. In October 1922, Donn Barber, a prominent designer of institutional and commercial buildings who had planned the Central Branch of the YWCA at East 52nd and Lexington in 1913, was selected as architect.

Meanwhile a corporation was formed to sell stock in the venture. The corporation would issue both preferred and common stock, with the common stock (which carried voting rights) assigned equally to the eighteen member-sororities of the National Panhellenic Association. Each national sorority was expected to purchase a controlling interest in its assigned shares and to sell the balance to its

members, thus assuring an equal representation of the sororities in the management of the project and the continued involvement "of those who would be sympathetic to the purposes and ideals of the Panhellenic House." It was decided that the common stock had to be subscribed before preferred shares would be offered for sale.

Though well meant, these restrictions severely limited the number of potential investors in the project and led to a long period of delay. It was not until 1925 that sufficient shares of common stock were sold to warrant the search for an appropriate site. This responsibility fell to Emily Eaton Hepburn, a philanthropist and civic leader, active in the sorority movement, who took over the Panhellenic project in 1926.

### Emily Eaton Hepburn and the Panhellenic Project

Emily Eaton was born in Middlesex, Vermont, in 1865. The daughter of a prosperous farmer, she attended public school in Montpelier and in 1886 graduated from St. Lawrence College in Canton, New York, then one of the few co-educational colleges in the country. The following year she married [Alonzo] Barton Hepburn (1846-1922), a former legislator and businessman. In 1891 the Hepburns moved to New York City, where Barton Hepburn began a successful career in banking, eventually becoming president and chairman of Chase National Bank. In addition to raising four children and taking post-graduate courses in botany and chemistry at Barnard College, Emily Hepburn devoted her considerable energies to social and civic activities.

Among her chief concerns were civil service reform and the women's suffrage movement. Working with such leading figures as Carrie Chapman Catt, she marched in suffrage parades, held suffrage meetings in her apartment, and traveled to different parts of the state organizing groups of suffragists. Once the vote for women was secured, she organized a political club for women on the East Side and served on the Republican County Committee. Believing that the study of history promoted good citizenship, she was active in the City History Club, serving as its president from 1914 to 1953. A founder of the Woman's Roosevelt Memorial Association, which honored Theodore Roosevelt's memory by erecting a house-museum at his birthplace site on East 20th Street in 1923, Hepburn negotiated the purchase of the site and

worked with the architect Theodate Pope Riddle in developing plans for the building.

Emily Hepburn became interested in the Panhellenic Project because she regarded the young women recently graduated from college, seeking careers in the city, as the heirs to the fight for women's rights to which she had devoted so many years. Moreover, she believed that the project offered an excellent opportunity "to prove that women could do big business."<sup>5</sup> She invested heavily in the Panhellenic Association stock, becoming the majority stockholder in the project. In 1926, she became president of the Association and began looking for a site for the new building. Inspired by the success of Anne Morgan, Elsie DeWolfe, and Elisabeth Marbury in redeveloping Sutton Place, Hepburn opted for a site on the far East Side at the corner of First Avenue and Mitchell Place, a small private street on a rise overlooking East 49th Street. There were slums and slaughterhouses to the south and west, transportation was bad, and neighborhood shopping non-existent. However, Mitchell Place intersected with the southern end of Beekman Place which was beginning to be redeveloped following the construction of two large apartment buildings, Beekman Terrace (1924) and Beekman Mansion (1926), on East 51st Street.<sup>6</sup> Concerned that she might lose the site, Hepburn bought the property in her own name in the spring of 1926. She turned it over to the Panhellenic Association in 1928, after she had persuaded the president of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, who lived in her apartment building, to give the Association a mortgage.

Since Donn Barber had died in 1925, Hepburn had to select a new architect for the project. She chose John Mead Howells, an architect with extensive experience in designing large-scale business and academic buildings, who had "a great interest in the housing problem."<sup>7</sup>

#### John Mead Howells<sup>8</sup>

The son of novelist William Dean Howells and nephew of architect William Rutherford Mead, John Mead Howells (1868-1959) trained at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard, and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. At Harvard, he became friends with I.N. Phelps Stokes who shared his interest in social and housing reform. In 1897, the architects collaborated on an entry for the competition to design the University Settlement House at Rivington and Eldridge Streets. When they won, they established a partnership. They subsequently designed the Tuskegee on West 62nd

Street, the first model tenements built specifically for African-Americans (1901-02, demolished). Other notable works by the firm included St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University (1904-07, a designated New York City Landmark), the Baltimore Stock Exchange (1905), the Royal Insurance Company Building (1909-10) at William Street and Maiden Lane in New York City, Paine Hall (1913) and the Dudley Memorial Gateway (1915) at Harvard University, and the Turk's Head Building (1916) in Providence, Rhode Island. They also were responsible for a redevelopment plan for the Metropolitan Tract in Seattle, including the Cobb Building (1909-10).

When the firm dissolved in 1917, Howells began practicing independently, designing such buildings as the neo-Romanesque Memorial Hall (1926-27) at Pratt University, a designated New York City Landmark, and the Art Deco style Title Guarantee & Trust Company Building (1929-30) at 6-8 East 45th Street. In 1922, Howells collaborated with Raymond Hood on an entry for the Chicago Tribune Building competition, placing first among a field of 259 applicants, in the most prestigious American architectural competition of the 1920s. Howells was associated with Hood on several other projects in the late 1920s, notably the apartment house at 3 East 84th Street (1927-28) and the Daily News Building (1929-30).<sup>9</sup>

In the 1930s, Howells became involved in the preservation and restoration of Colonial buildings, working primarily in Charleston, South Carolina, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He also wrote extensively on early American architecture, publishing numerous articles and three books: *Lost Examples of Colonial Architecture*, *Architectural Heritage of the Piscataqua*, and *Architectural Heritage of the Merrimack*.

#### The Design of the Panhellenic Tower<sup>10</sup>

The location of the Panhellenic site at the intersection of two wide streets made it possible to design a tall building that would take advantage of the spectacular views from the top of Beekman Hill. The original building rose from a three-story base that covered the entire lot, extending eighty-one feet along First Avenue and 108 feet along Mitchell Place. On the western end of the lot, a square, twenty-six-story, seventy-five-foot-wide tower terminates in a series of short setbacks. The three-story base originally contained reception rooms, lounges, offices, a dining room, and kitchen facilities. At the eastern end of the building was a

two-story ballroom-auditorium, which had a separate entrance on Mitchell Place so that the space could be rented to outside groups. Rental income was also provided by ground-floor shops along First Avenue. The tower contained 380 bedrooms, most with private baths and many with private balconies. There was a large roof garden for the residents above the ballroom wing opening off the Panhellenic's fourth floor clubhouse and a twenty-sixth floor solarium surrounded by balconies.

In designing the exterior of the Panhellenic Building, Howells drew on three sources: his and Raymond Hood's prize-winning design for the Chicago Tribune Building, Eliel Saarinen's influential second-place design for that competition, and Raymond Hood's American Radiator Company Building (1923-24). Howells reinterpreted the setback massing and composition of Saarinen's design and the angled corners, crenelated decorations, and vertical lines of the Tribune tower and Radiator Company Building to create a design of unusual power "which provided the next dramatic step toward astylar skyscraper composition."<sup>11</sup> Howells stripped away the Gothic ornaments and buttresses of his prototypes, simplified their forms, and transformed their angled corner bays into monolithic piers pierced only by a single column of windows. He turned the need for light courts on the sides of the Panhellenic into a virtue,<sup>12</sup> creating a powerfully modeled design that made the building seem "more a solid mass than a hollow container."<sup>13</sup>

This impression of solid mass is enhanced by the bold vertical striping of the deeply recessed window and spandrel bays set between wide piers. Vertical recesses at the top of the piers, just below the setbacks, reinforce the vertical shadow pattern and enhance the telescoping effect of the setbacks.<sup>14</sup> Great attention was given to creating a unified surface treatment. The brick, stone, and mortar were matched in color and the mortar joints laid flush with the brickwork "to produce the impression that the building has been built out of, or carved out of one material."<sup>15</sup>

The base of the building is articulated with pilaster strips, incised Greek lettering, and stylized cartouches and finials that suggest Gothic forms but are Art Deco in style. On Mitchell Place, the main entrance to the hotel is set off by Art Deco sculptural panels designed by the noted sculptor Rene Chambellan who had worked with Howells on the Tribune building and Pratt Memorial Hall. Leaded-glass windows at the second story echo the Art Deco foliate forms of the sculptural ornament. The building terminates in an openwork parapet of

rounded arches and spiked forms suggestive of Gothic finials.

The Panhellenic tower was lit with spot floodlights that highlighted the setbacks and deep corners of the building.<sup>16</sup> Howells noted that the highlighting was carefully planned to accentuate the architectural forms of the building and that "it dies off in a rather fairy-like way at the top."<sup>17</sup> Although the light applied was white, the orange brick produced a warm amber color.

Even before the Panhellenic Tower Hotel opened for business in October 1928, Howells had filed plans with the Building Department to construct an eighteen-foot-wide, ten-story addition at 7 Mitchell Place.<sup>18</sup> The new wing was to contain a gymnasium, offices for the hotel, and studio apartments. Because the addition's west wall would be freestanding above the adjoining three-story auditorium wing and would be highly visible from the corner, Howells treated it as a principal facade.

Like the main building, the annex is faced in tan brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern. Its design features recessed window bays and projecting piers and employs arched openings at the first story echoing the arched entrances at the base of the tower. The cast-stone coping along the roofline incorporates the open-work curved decorations used on the tower and auditorium wings.

The Panhellenic Tower was extensively published in the American architectural press and won international renown through publication in the French periodicals *L'Architecte*, *Architecture Internationale*, and *L'Architecture*.<sup>19</sup> The *New Yorker* declared it "a glorious building on a glorious site."<sup>20</sup> For the *New York Times*, "the huge square monolith" was "an outstanding example of American skyscraper architecture."<sup>21</sup> Howells's design received an award for outstanding architectural merit from the First Avenue Association in 1929 which cited the building as "a well-studied example of the modernist treatment and a frank solution of its special problem of housing."<sup>22</sup> The Panhellenic Tower soon became a model for future works, notably Shreve Lamb & Harmon's R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Building in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, completed in April 1929.<sup>23</sup> Its astylar articulation and bold vertical striping may also have been an inspiration for design of the Daily News Building.

#### Conversion to the Beekman Tower Hotel and Subsequent Changes

The success of the Panhellenic project prompted Emily Hepburn to undertake another building project

in 1931, the construction of an apartment building, 2 Beekman Place, at the eastern end of Mitchell Place.<sup>24</sup> Hepburn, herself, moved to a penthouse at No. 2 and in later years became known as "the Grand Old Lady of Beekman Hill."<sup>25</sup> Her two buildings are thought to have been important factor in the development of the Beekman Place-Mitchell Place enclave which became one of the most fashionable in the city. Thus she met her goal of demonstrating that "women could undertake and carry through projects of substantial proportions" which she believed was essential if women were to "enter into the nation's life in an important way."<sup>26</sup>

Although the Panhellenic Tower was a financial success during its first years of operation, it soon became apparent that a hotel that limited its clientele to sorority women could not survive the Depression. The hotel, its name changed to the Beekman Tower, was opened to men and women regardless of affiliation. However, it continued to provide special facilities for sorority women and to be run by a board comprised of representatives of the sororities, with Hepburn as chairman. In order to supplement the hotel's income, cocktail lounges were installed in the ground floor restaurant and the top floor solarium which was renamed the Tower Room. Renowned for its spectacular views, this popular gathering place was enlarged in 1959, when the outdoor porches were enclosed. By 1959 the commercial space on First Avenue had also been converted to restaurant use. In 1960 the entire building was air-conditioned using through-the-wall air-conditioners.

In 1964, the building was sold to 3 Mitchell Place, Inc., headed by Benjamin J. Denihan and Arthur W. Bresciani, Sr. The new owners had architect Sidney Goldhammer convert the building to an apartment hotel. Goldhammer installed new bathrooms and kitchenettes in the tower and converted the auditorium to apartments. In conjunction with these alterations, marble facings were installed on the ground story. The hotel drew most of its guests from the nearby United Nations and from large corporations "that needed rooms with kitchens for weeks at a time to house employees who were being trained or relocated."<sup>27</sup> Celebrity guests included Geraldine Chaplin, Pearl Bailey, and Frank Zappa.<sup>28</sup> The rooftop lounge remained a popular attraction and was enlarged sometime between 1979 and 1990.<sup>29</sup>

According to the New York Times, "by the late 1980s the 170-room hotel was showing its age."<sup>30</sup> Between 1989 and 1991 the rooms and lobby were

refurbished and the ground floor corner restaurant was redone. The marble facings were removed from the ground story revealing many original details including decorative tiles ornamented with Greek lettering and a pierced sandstone sculptural panel designed by Rene Chambellan. New windows, doors, lighting fixtures, and canopies were installed on Mitchell Place. Etched glass lunettes, decorated with a stylized palmette motif copied from the original metal lunette decoration, were inserted in the arches over the hotel entrance and flanking windows. Between 1996 and 1997 sections of the upper wall on both the tower and apartment building at 7 Mitchell Place were taken down and rebuilt in compliance with Local Law 10.

Today the all-suite Beekman Tower Hotel continues to operate as part of the ten-hotel Manhattan East hotel chain owned by the Denihan family.

#### Description

The Panhellenic Tower is located on a rectangular lot which extends 126 feet along Mitchell Place and eighty-one feet along First Avenue. The building occupies almost the entire lot except for a narrow service passage at the north end of the lot which extends eastward about twenty-five feet from First Avenue. The building is comprised of three distinct sections -- the twenty-six-story hotel tower; the three-story wing, which originally contained a dining room and auditorium, now converted to apartments; and a ten-story apartment wing which was completed a year after the main building. Both the hotel and apartment annex have steel frames and are clad in brick. Generally orange-tan in color, the bricks vary in hue from buff to gray-brown and are laid in a Flemish-bond pattern. The Art Deco design of the building depends largely on the dramatic massing of the setback skyscraper tower and on the interplay of volumes and lights and darks created by the projected piers and recessed window bays. The ornament is concentrated at the base and top of the building and consists primarily of decorative brick pilaster strips and corbeling and the cast-stone Art Deco ornament. Most of the building's windows were replaced in the early 1990s except for the arched steel sash windows with leaded-glass lights at the second story of the tower and auditorium wing and twenty-sixth story of the tower.

#### **The Tower**

The twenty-six-story, seventy-five-foot-wide tower is basically square in plan at street level, but

has an angled corner on First Avenue and Mitchell Place and an extension on the north side of the building adjoining the dining room-auditorium wing. The facades are articulated into seven bays. The five center bays set back at the third story to form light courts which are flanked by powerful angled corner bays. At the twentieth and twenty-second stories the corner bays set back to create balconies which are surrounded by brick parapets. At the twenty-fourth story the three center bays are set back and have balconies with brick parapets. The entire twenty-sixth story is set back and is surrounded by balconies which have been enclosed with glass and metal partitions on the east and west sides of the building.

Base: The base is two stories high, except on Mitchell Place where the center three bays rise to three stories emphasizing the main hotel entrance. The angled southern corner at the intersection of the two street facades is recessed and contains the entrance to a ground story restaurant. The northern corner which was also originally angled and recessed has been filled with a one-story extension which is unarticulated. On Mitchell Place the triple bay is articulated by wide pilaster strips which terminate above the third story in a cresting of stylized cast-stone fleurs-de-lis and foliate moldings. Wide pilaster strips also are used at the ground story to frame the corner bay and the end bays on Mitchell Place and First Avenue. Narrower strips capped by cast-stone finials articulate the second story. In 1990-91 marble, travertine, and Dryvit facing materials, which had been installed at the ground story, were removed and the masonry on the base was repaired and repointed.

*Mitchell Place facade:* On the ground story the brick pilasters articulating the three center bays are decorated with bricks with incised Greek lettering. A cornerstone at the base of the eastern pilaster is inscribed with the date "1928." The main hotel entrance at the center of the facade and the adjacent window bays have arched surrounds which retain their original shaped transom bars. The transoms contain backlit etched glass lunettes which are decorated with a stylized palmette pattern. The central entrance has deep brick-faced jambs. This doorway opens into a small vestibule with a travertine floor and travertine-faced walls; the ceiling is vaulted. There are light boxes at the base of the vault. At the rear of the vestibule are a pair of unframed glass doors with polished bronze trim. The bays flanking the entrance bay contain decorative multi-pane steel windows fabricated in the 1990s. Extending in front of the center three bays

is a large fixed awning with polished bronze supports which was installed in the 1990s. The upper portion of the awning appears to be constructed of metal which is covered with vinyl-coated canvas. There are several lighting fixtures on the underside of the awning. Flanking the awning are neo-Deco sconces, installed in the 1990s, which were inspired by, but do not match, the sconces that originally framed the central entrance bay.

Reading west to east, the second and sixth bay have blind rectangular window openings which contain Art Deco sculptural panels featuring stylized palm trees and scrolls. The western pierced sandstone panel is original. In the 1990s an opening which had been cut directly above the window was sealed and the area was refaced with matching brickwork. The eastern panel is cast stone and was fabricated in the 1990s to match the original panel, which had been lost when a louvered vent was installed in the bay. As part of the restoration of the bay, the wall and sill beneath the opening were also rebuilt.

The entrance at the eastern corner of the tower facade (seventh bay) has deep brick-faced jambs. The paving stone in the jamb area is travertine with a pink granite curb. The doorway contains a pair of historic glass doors with polished bronze trim (the doors were reglazed during the 1990s renovations but retain their original fittings). The fixed vinyl-coated canvas awning with polished bronze supports was installed in the 1990s.

The window at the western corner of the tower facade (first bay) originally contained a fixed twelve-light window. When the restaurant opened on First Avenue an illuminated window box with polished bronze trim was installed in the opening. In the 1990s, when the steel lintel over the window was repaired, the brick facing over the window was replaced in matching brick. (The window box was reinstalled.)

The narrow paired arched windows at the second story contain steel-sash windows which appear to retain their original leaded-glass lights or have replacement glass that replicates the original tracery pattern. In the 1990s the spandrel panels beneath the third, fourth, and fifth bays were rebuilt, removing the remaining traces of original stone sculptural ornament from the panels. The spandrels were refaced in matching brick and louvers were reinstalled beneath the third and fifth windows. There are also louvers beneath the windows in the first and second bays.

The large round-arched window openings in the center three bays of third story originally contained tripartite windows topped by tripartite lunettes. The openings currently have paired aluminum casement windows topped by single-paned semi-circular transoms. The stone finials which originally terminated the narrow pilasters extending from the second-story windows to the third-story window bays have been removed. There are louvered air-conditioner grilles beneath the windows in the second and fourth bays (reading west to east). The metal flagpoles which project from the third story are historic but not original.

*Corner entrance:* The recessed corner entrance is set a step above sidewalk level. It retains its historic glass door and transom with polished bronze trim and hardware. Above the door is a sloping reveal and a hexagonal panel with banded trim. Projecting in front of the reveal is a small triangular canopy installed in the early 1990s. A sculptural relief representing stylized palm leaves extends from the top of the recessed panel to the bottom of the third story window. An opening for an air conditioner louver has been cut in the relief just below the third-story window.

*First Avenue facade:* The ground story of the First Avenue facade is framed by projecting bays. The southern corner bay contains an illuminated window box with polished bronze trim. (There is a large bronze-finished grille beneath the window.) The northern corner bay contains a historic glass door with polished bronze trim and hardware. The intervening bays which originally contained several storefronts now are occupied by the single storefront. This has a low wall topped by a picture window which extends the length of the storefront. The wall is faced with a green-black marble and is pierced by several vents. The picture window is divided into five sections by metal stops. The stops and window surround have a polished bronze finish; the window glass is decorated with white stenciling. The storefront is surmounted by a box cornice with a polished-bronze finished. A decorative brick course above the cornice is largely concealed by a fixed vinyl-coated canvas awning with signage for the restaurant.

The articulation of the second story on First Avenue is identical with that on Mitchell Place. The windows also have replacement leaded-glass lights. Louvered grilles are placed beneath the windows in the third and fifth bays (reading south to north).

*North facade and service alley:* There is a six-foot-high wall on the north end of the alley which abuts the rear wall of the adjoining building on First

Avenue. The wall is faced with tan brick laid in a Flemish-bond pattern and coped with stone slabs. An iron picket and chain-link fence and a metal gate extend between this wall and the north wall of the hotel. The north wall of the tower base extends east for four bays before breaking back into a two-story extension. Only the second story of the western portion of the north wall and side wall of the extension are visible from the street. At the second story the north wall has paired arched windows. These match the second-story windows on the other facades in size and shape but only the corner window is set off by decorative ribbing. There are air-conditioner louvers beneath the windows. On the two-story addition, the side wall has a rectangular window opening at the second story which contains a six-over-six double-hung vinyl-coated aluminum sash window.

Upper Stories Above the base, the tower's facades are identical in design and are articulated by single tiers of recessed windows and spandrels. The window bays in the recessed side courts are separated by projecting piers which rise unbroken to the twenty-fourth story parapet. Projecting piers also frame the center bays from the twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth stories terminating in stylized finials which alternate with open arches to form a decorative cresting at the skyline. Paired recesses on the upper portion of the piers and vertical recesses and projections on the side walls of the corner bays enhance the verticality of the design. At the twenty-fourth and twenty-sixth stories, the balcony parapets are treated as decorative brick balustrades. The tops of the piers which form part of the balustrade were originally capped by massive scrolled stone finials which have been removed. At the twenty-sixth story the double-sized windows have segmental arch enframements and contain historic sash with a central arched pane and radiating outer panes. The six-over-six double-hung vinyl-coated aluminum sash windows used in the rest of the window openings in the tower are recent replacements which match the original windows in configuration and operation but not in material or detail. At least half of the windows have through-the-wall air conditioner grilles beneath them. There are a number of areas on the masonry which have been patched or repointed with light-hued mortar that does not match the brickwork, notably above the twentieth-story setback on the west and south facades and on the projecting southeast and northwest corner bays. Recently, the brick facings on the southwest corner of the tower extending from the top of the twenty-first-story window to the top of

the twentieth-second-story parapet and on the west and south walls below the twenty-fourth story parapets have been replaced.

### **Auditorium Wing**

The three-story auditorium wing is rectangular in plan and covers the entirety of its thirty-three-foot-wide, eighty-foot-deep site. The brick facade is divided into four bays by wide pilaster strips. The first story has large segmental-arched window openings. These contain replacement steel sash, with an unusual modern design, installed in the early 1990s. The windows have small fixed awnings installed in the 1990s. At the second story the paired arched windows and ribbed articulation is continued from the second story of the tower. The windows have double-hung steel sash which appear to retain their original leaded-glass lights or have replacement glass that replicates the original tracery pattern. The round-arched window openings at the third story originally contained paired casement windows with a wide center mullion and narrow rails separating the top arched panes from the lower lights. The present aluminum-framed paired casements with semi-circular transoms match the windows at the third story in the three center bays of the tower. There are louvered grilles beneath the first, third, and fourth window bays (reading west to east). The high parapet that runs along the roof of the auditorium wing is coped with a stone border featuring a stylized palmette molding over the pilasters and an openwork arches over the window bays. The stone finials which originally capped the center pilasters between the second and third-story windows have been removed. The brickwork between the third-story arches and the roof has been repointed with a light mortar that does not match the original mortar or bricks.

### **Apartment Annex**

Rectangular in plan, the addition occupies almost the entirety of its eighteen-foot-wide, eighty-foot-deep lot. It is ten stories high and has a setback penthouse story. Its west wall is freestanding above the third story and is treated as a secondary facade.

Mitchell Place facade On Mitchell Place the brick facade is divided into a narrow eastern bay and wider western bay. Brick courses separate the two-story base from the upper stories.

*Base* At the ground story the eastern entrance bay and two windows in the western bay have arched surrounds. These arches retain their original shaped wood transom bars which are surmounted by lunettes with stuccoed infill. The lunette over the

doorway retains its original rough stucco infill and streamlined striated metal decoration. Matching railings (their round metal anchors are still visible in the brickwork) originally rested on the low brick parapets flanking the granite steps to the recessed entrance porch. This small vestibule retains its original granite pavers and brick-faced walls. A light fixture is suspended from the plastered vaulted ceiling. The paneled wood door with nine-light window is original. The entrance to the porch is flanked by small light fixtures that are not original and is fronted by a fixed canopy installed in the 1990s. The two window bays contain double-hung six-over-six vinyl-coated aluminum windows. (The original windows in these bays were paired steel multi-light casements topped by a transom.)

At the second story the eastern bay contains a pair of double-hung six-over-six windows while the wider western bay contains three windows. (The original windows were steel multi-light casements.) There is a large louvered grille beneath the paired windows in the west bay. Extending above the windows a corbeled brick drip molding consisting of a soldier course topped by horizontal and vertical header courses.

*Upper Stories* A corbeled sill course beneath the third-story windows emphasizes the separation between the base and upper stories. On the upper stories the bays are articulated by wide projecting piers; the windows and spandrels are recessed. On the third story, the window openings are of equal height; on the floors above the eastern window openings are slightly shorter than double-window openings in the western bays. All of the windows contain replacement double-hung six-over-six sash. There are large louvered grilles beneath the windows in the western bays.

Western Elevation The western wall is articulated into a symmetrical seven-bay design. A narrow center bay articulates a stair tower which rises to eleven stories to reach the penthouse. This bay, which is the focus of the design, is slightly projected. Its narrow window openings contain steel casements which appear to be original. On the north and south sides of the facade, triple-window bays are flanked by single bays with small rectangular window openings. Both the large and small openings contain replacement double-hung six-over-six sash. There are louvered air conditioner grilles beneath the center window in both triple bays. The tenth story is surmounted by a brick parapet which steps up over the center bay. The parapet is coped with a cast-stone frieze featuring a palmette motif and arched openings. In 1997,



brickwork was taken down and replaced between the tenth-story windows and the top of the parapet at the southwest corner of the building and on the northern end of the west wall. Except for the stair tower, the penthouse is well set back from the roofline and does not appear to have designed facades.

Report prepared by  
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Research Department

#### NOTES

1. The Landmarks Preservation Commission previously held public hearings on this item in 1983 (LP-1422) and 1990 (LP-1801).
2. In 1900, only 85,000 women were enrolled in college: by 1920 their number had increased to over a quarter of a million and fully 40 percent of all college graduates were women.

For the changing nature of women's education and career plans in the post-World War I period see Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 181; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 227; Marion Dale, "Clubhouse for Business Women, *Banta's Greek Exchange* 13 (Apr. 1925), 174.

3. On the post-war housing crunch see the *Real Estate Record & Guide* for 1920. For the housing problems of young career women in New York and the Panhellenic Association's plans for a new clubhouse and residential hotel see Dale, 174; "A Panhellenic House by 1923," *Banta's Greek Exchange* 11 (Sept. 1923), 216-220.
4. "A Panhellenic House by 1923," 216.
5. Savell, 114.
6. For the redevelopment of Beekman Hill see Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 431-433; W. Parker Chase, *New York The Wonder City* (New York: Wonder City Publishing Co., 1932), 272.
7. Emily Eaton Hepburn, quoted in Savell, 121.
8. This section on John Mead Howells is based on I.N. Phelps Stokes, "Random Recollections of a Happy Life," rev. and amplified edit., bound mimeograph, 1941, in Classics, Avery Architectural Library; "John Mead Howells," *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 45, 352-353; Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, ed., *Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to Architects* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1994).
9. The Daily News Building is a designated New York City Landmark; 3 E. 84th Street is within the Metropolitan Museum Historic District.
10. This discussion of the design of the Panhellenic Tower is based on New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, New Building Application 403-1927; John Mead Howells "The Verticality of the Skyscraper," *American Architect* 134 (Dec. 20, 1928), 787-810; "Plans \$1,630,500 Project for College Women on East Side," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, Feb. 5, 1927, 9; Stern, 215; Arnold Lehman, *The New York Skyscraper: A History of its Development, 1870-1939* (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1974: Ann Arbor, UMI, 1974), 355-360; Courty Andrews, "The Panhellenic Tower and CBS 51W52," Seminar Paper, Columbia University, 1986.

11. Stern, 215. The early projects for the Panhellenic were initially quite close to the Tribune Tower and Radiator design. As his design evolved, Howells seems to have been increasingly influenced by Saarinen's use of compactly-massed, telescoping setbacks and clear articulation of forms. There were also several other buildings which Howells described in "Verticality" [p. 788] as successful examples of skyscraper design (Bush Tower, Shelton Hotel, Barclay-Vesey Building) that probably also influenced his thinking on the project. Finally, in "Verticality" [p. 789] Howells indicated that he was much struck by "the simple, and rather monumental effect" of Rene Chambellan's wax model for the Panhellenic and decided to reproduce that effect as much as possible.
12. Courts were needed to light the lower stories of the tower because there were buildings to the north and east of the Panhellenic site. To ensure that future development would not block the tower's light and air, Hepburn acquired both these properties -- the northern property in the Panhellenic Association's name, the eastern property in her own name. The northern property was sold to a developer subject to a restrictive covenant limiting the height of future buildings; Hepburn subsequently turned the eastern property at 7 Mitchell Place over to Panhellenic Association where it constructed an apartment-annex to the hotel. See New Building Application 403-1927.
13. Stern, 215.
14. Howells said of this vertical emphasis -- *The simple composition of verticals, which some like to call modernistic, seems to me to be 'indicated'... for the design of steel cage buildings. It is the simplest and most straightforward clothing of the steel cage itself, in masonry, for several reasons. First, the verticals are accentuated just as in the steel cage itself... The emphasis is definitely on them, while the horizontal members are built in between them. Second, the grouping of vertical lines holds windows in place naturally in the composition, instead of resorting to the old fashion of piercing a flat wall with windows, as a waffle-iron is pierced with squares. Third, the verticals can terminate naturally against the sky, as they reach their various zoning levels, in the same way that a growth of pine trees or a palisade or cliff ends against the sky.* See Howells, "Verticality," 782.
15. Ibid, 789.
16. On the illumination of the Panhellenic see John Mead Howells, "Fundamentals of Architecture as Related to Lighting," *Transactions of the Illuminating Engineering Society*, 25( May 1930), 474-475.
17. Ibid, 474.
18. Alteration Application 1614-1928.
19. Among the American publications were Howells, "Verticality"; "Study, Panhellenic House," *Architect* 7 (Jan 1927), pls; Rayne Adams, Thoughts on Modern, and Other Ornament," *Pencil Points* 10 (Jan. 1929), 3-15; "The Panhellenic Tower, New York City," *Architectural Record* 65 (Mar. 1929), 262-264; John Shapely, "Architecture in New York," *Parnasus* 1 (May 1929), 5-6, 8. Architectural League of New York, *Yearbook*, 1927, 1929. In "Verticality," Howells mentions a request for pictures of the Panhellenic from the French modernist architect Roux-Spitz for publication in the journal *L'Architecte*. For the articles in *Architecture Internationale* and *L'Architecture* see Isabelle Gournay, "L'Architecture Americaine dans la presse professionnelle francaise, 1920-40," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* ser. 6, v. 117 (Apr. 1991), 196-198, 200.
20. "New Apartments," *New Yorker*, Sept. 22, 1928, 55-57;
21. Walter Rendell Storby, "Beauty in Community Houses," *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 1928, sec. 5, p. 13.
22. "First Avenue Body Makes 4 Awards," *New York Times*, Mar. 31, 1929, sec. 11, p. 1. See also "Awards of Merit for Building on Far East Side," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, Mar. 30, 1929, 8.

23. Lehman, 359.
24. New Building Application 10-1931. On 2 Beekman Place and Emily Hepburn's role in the development of Beekman Hill see John Lewis, "Tiny Beekman Place Had a Big Role," *Daily News*, Jan. 23, 1993, MB 10.
25. Lewis, MB 10.
26. Emily Hepburn quoted in Savell, 132. See also Frances Drewery McMullen, "Panhellenic House," *Women's Journal*, Jan. 1929, 20-21,40; "A Woman Does Some Skyscraping," *Women's Journal*, July 1929, 11.
27. David W. Dunlap, "Creating New Roles for Art Deco Buildings," *New York Times*, Feb. 10, 1991, sec. R, p. 11.
28. "Riches of Beekman Place," *New York Times*, Mar. 4, 1977, sec. C, p. 18.
29. This alteration is documented by dated survey photographs and slides in the collection of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.
30. Dunlap, sec. R, p. 11.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Panhellenic Tower (now Beekman Tower Hotel) has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Panhellenic Tower (now the Beekman Tower Hotel), is one of the great Art Deco skyscrapers in mid-town Manhattan; that erected in 1927-29 to the designs of the noted architect John Mead Howells, the Panhellenic Tower is renowned for the dramatic volumetric massing and bold vertical striping of its twenty-six story setback tower; that its striking modernistic design features chamfered corners, deeply recessed window-and-spandrel bays, and handsome Gothic-inspired Art Deco ornament by the leading architectural sculptor Rene Chambellan; that the Panhellenic Tower was a widely published work and is regarded as a significant step in the development of New York skyscraper design; that built as a residence and clubhouse for women belonging to national Greek-letter college sororities, the Panhellenic Tower provided affordable housing for young college-educated women who were entering the work force in record numbers in the 1920s; that later converted to the Beekman Tower Hotel it has remained an important presence in the Beekman Hill neighborhood.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Panhellenic Tower, now Beekman Tower Hotel, 3 Mitchell Place (aka 1-7 Mitchell Place, 876-880 First Avenue), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1361, Lot 1, as its Landmark Site.



Panhellenic Tower (now the Beekman Tower Hotel)  
3 Mitchell Place (aka 1-7 Mitchell Place, 876-880 First Avenue), Manhattan  
Photo: Carl Forster

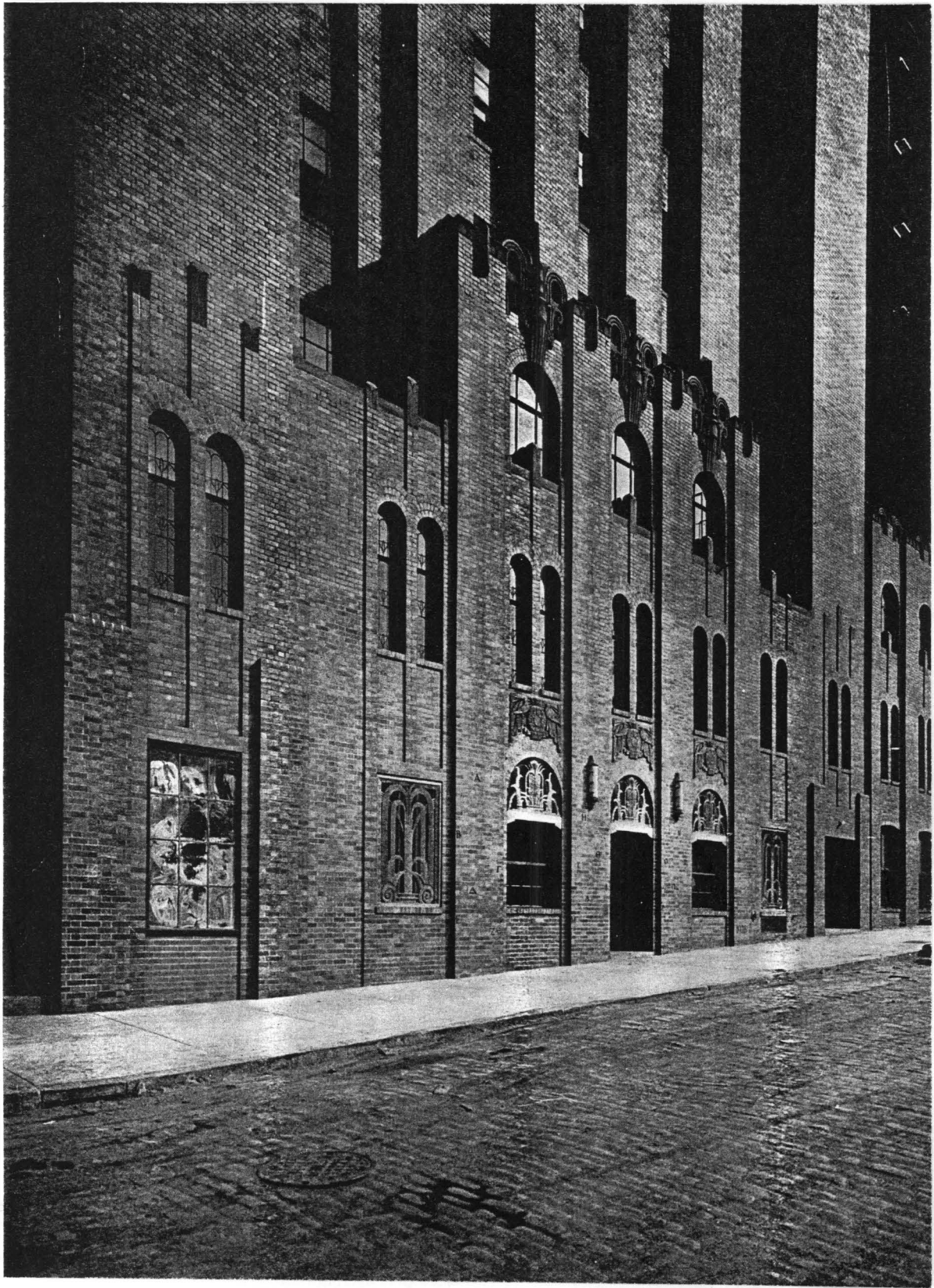


The Panhellenic Tower from the northwest showing the First Avenue facade  
Photo: Carl Forster



Panhellenic Tower, c. 1928

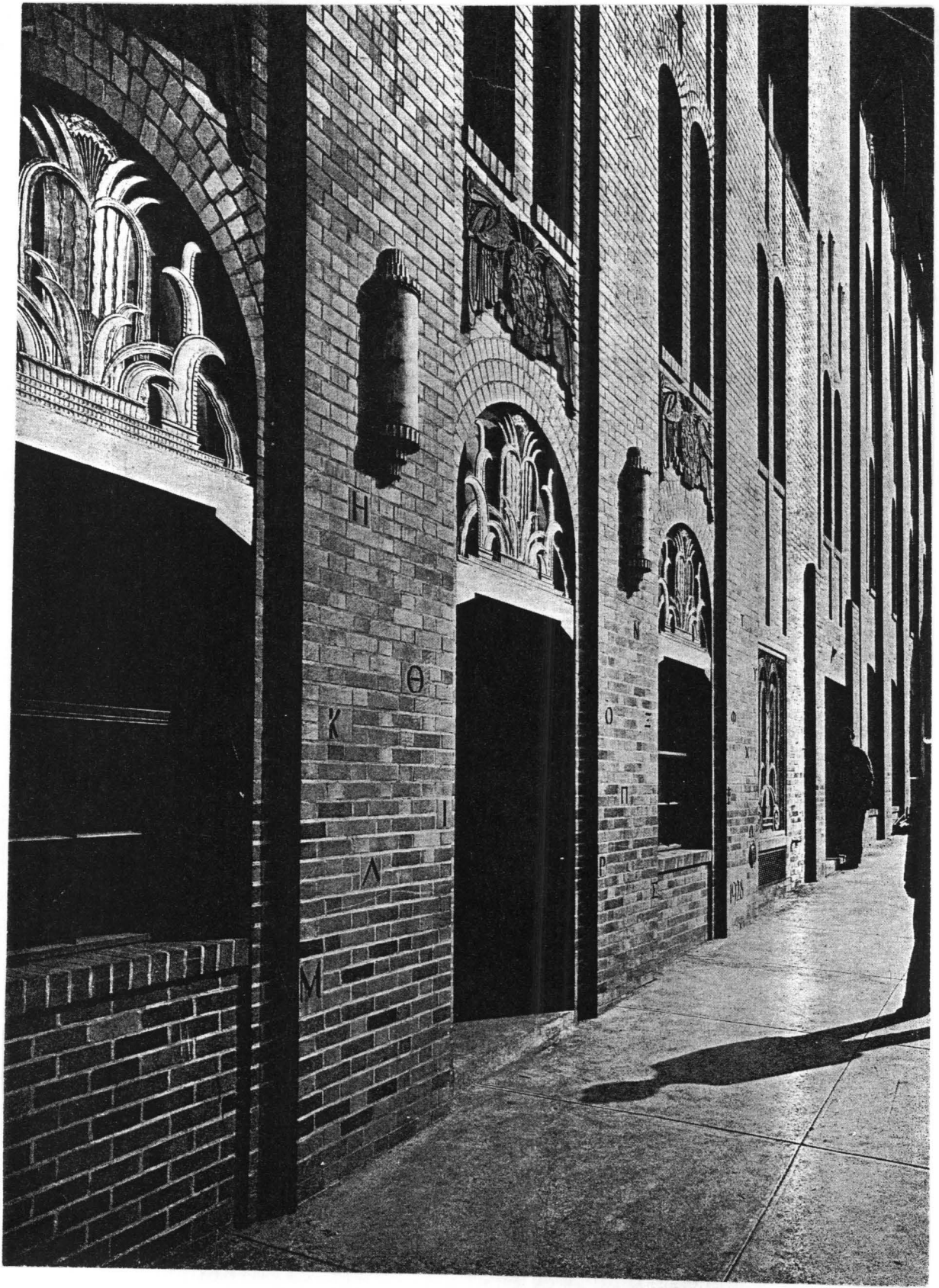
Source: Architectural League of New York, *Yearbook*, 1929



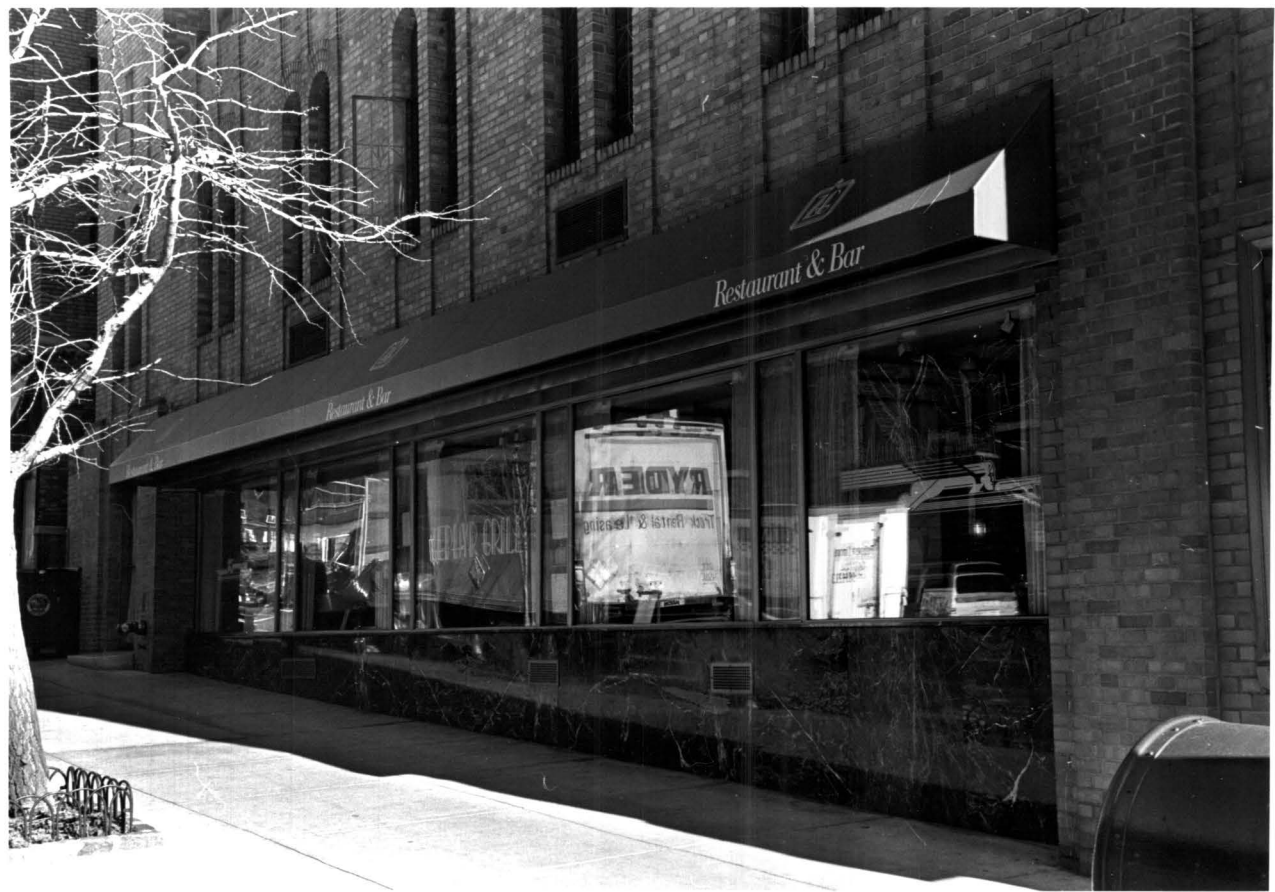
Base of the tower on Mitchell Place, c. 1928

Source: *American Architect*



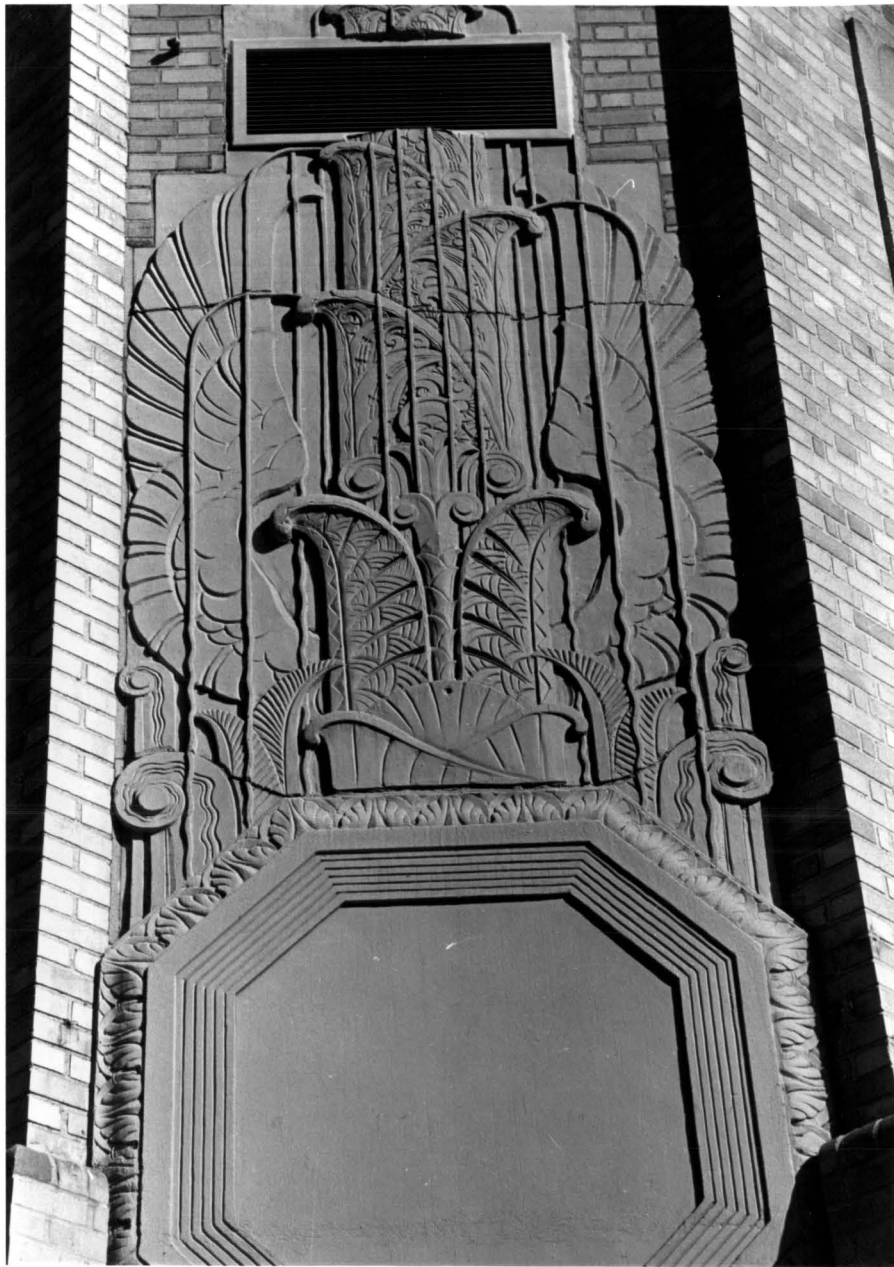


Detail of the hotel entrance, c. 1928  
Source: *American Architect*



Ground story on First Avenue (top) and Mitchell Place (bottom)

Photos: Carl Forster



Art Deco sculptural panels designed by Rene Chambellan  
Photos: Carl Forster



Detail of the third story center bays on Mitchell Place  
Photos: Carl Forster



Details of upper stories on Mitchell Place  
Photos: Carl Forster



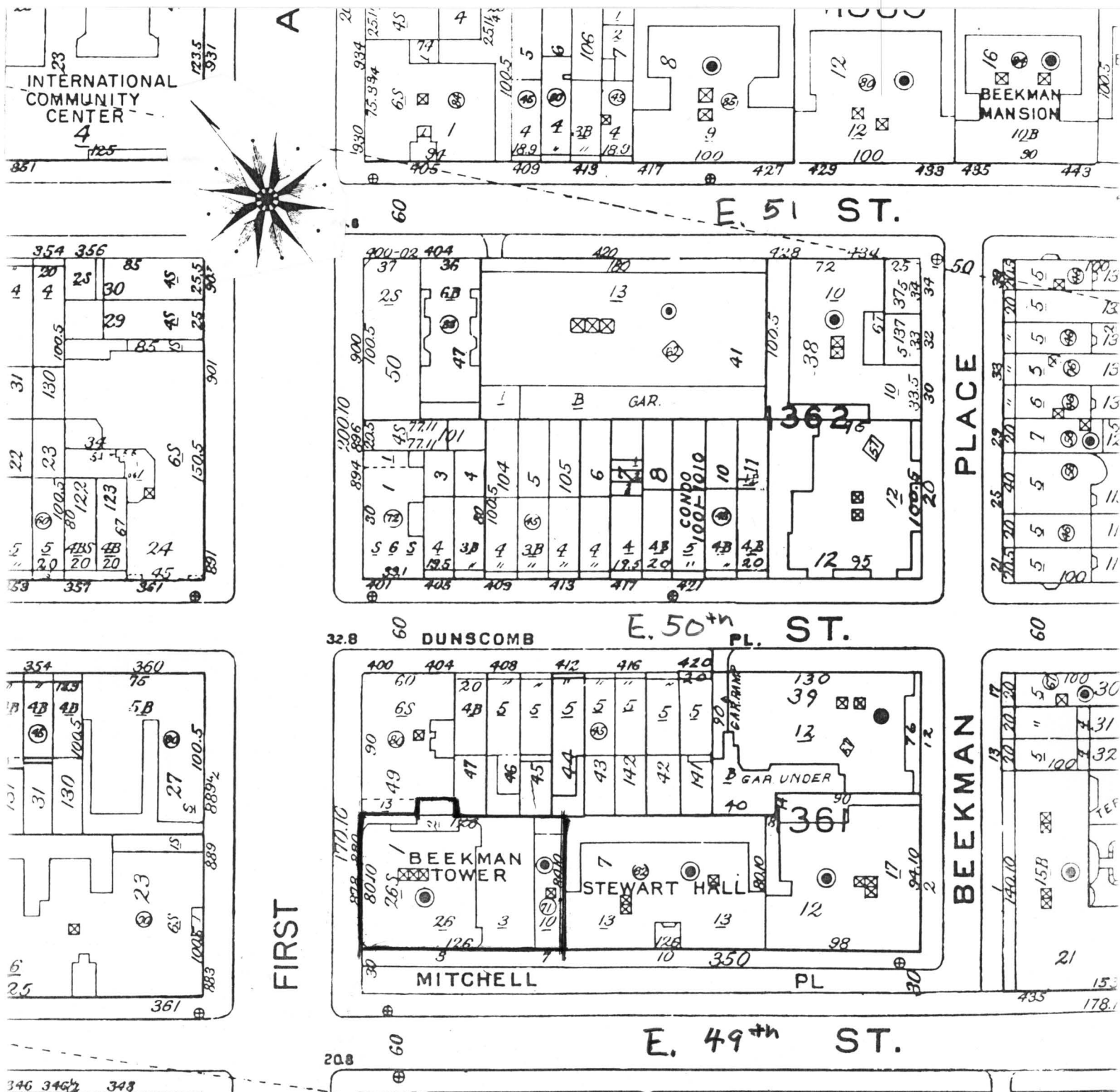
Tower from southwest (left) and the northwest (right)

Photos: Carl Forster



Corner restaurant entrance; auditorium wing and apartment addition on Mitchell Place

Photos: Carl Forster



Panhellenic Tower (now Beekman Tower Hotel)  
 3 Mitchell Place (aka 1-7 Mitchell Place, 876-880 First Avenue, Manhattan  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1361, Lot 1

Source: Sanborn Manhattan Landbook, 1996-97





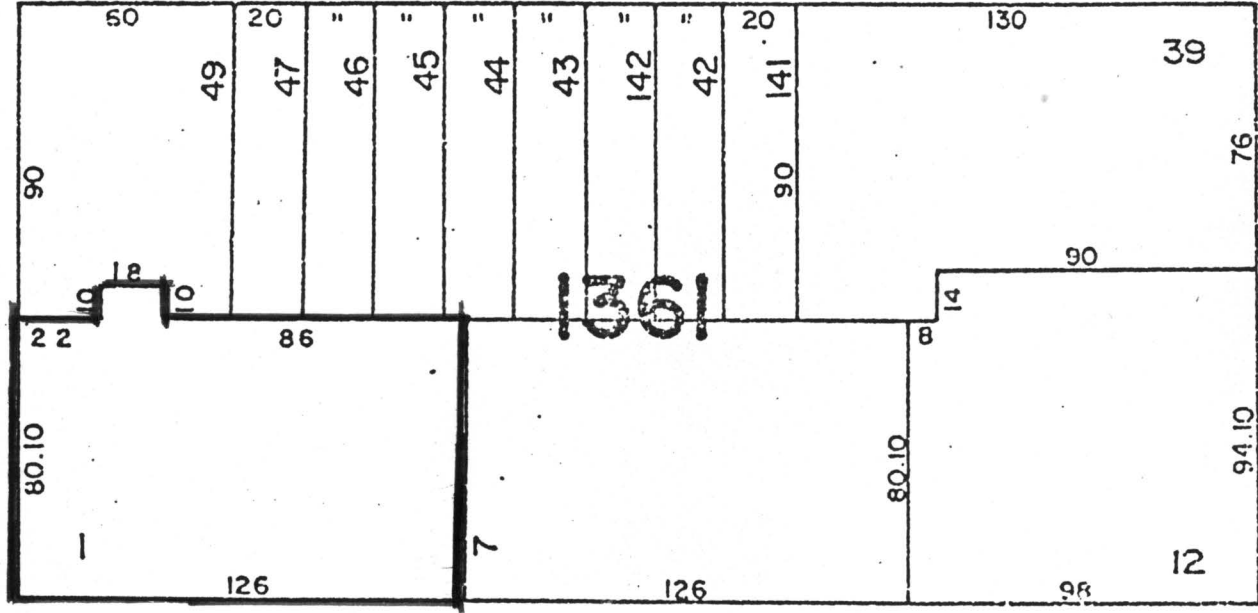
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MITCHELL

PL.

E.

49<sup>TH</sup>

BEEKMAN

Panhellenic Tower (now Beekman Tower Hotel)  
 3 Mitchell Place (aka 1-7 Mitchell Place, 876-880 First Avenue, Manhattan)  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1361, Lot 1  
 Source: New York City Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map 6

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