

**Downtown Athletic Club Building**, 19 West Street (aka 18-20 West Street and 28-32 Washington Street), Manhattan. Built 1929-30; Starrett & Van Vleck, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 15, Lot 19

On October 24, 2000 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Downtown Athletic Club Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item no.1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were two speakers in favor of designation, including a representative of the owner of the building and a representative from the Historic Districts Council. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

### Summary

This 35-story, Art Deco skyscraper opened in 1930 as the Downtown Athletic Club. A membership association geared toward businessmen and lawyers who worked in lower Manhattan, the Downtown Athletic Club was founded in 1926. By 1927 it had purchased this site next to the Hudson River to construct its own building. The high cost of land necessitated a tall building, and the relatively small lot size dictated that the different functions and facilities of the club, including swimming pool, gymnasium, miniature golf course, squash, and tennis courts, as well as dining rooms and living quarters, be accommodated on separate floors. The Downtown Athletic Club became most famous as the home of the Heisman Trophy, given every year to the most outstanding college football player, and named after John Heisman, the club's first athletic director. The prolific architectural firm of Starrett & Van Vleck designed the building. The same firm created the neighboring tower at 21 West Street (a designated New York City Landmark), with which the Club shares its modernistic style and skillfully applied brickwork. The boxy shape and variety of setbacks in the Downtown Athletic Club Building demonstrate the effects of the 1916 Building Zone Resolution, but also give some indication of the various purposes assigned to different sections of the building. The architects juxtaposed the simple massing of the building with stylized, theater-like entrance prosceniums on both facades and a dextrous use of flat and angled brick, creating a dramatic addition to the city's skyline. The powerful chevron motifs in the rectangular areas over the entrances and in the spandrels between the windows of the upper stories are a variation of a common design theme of the period, reflective of the speed and energy of the Jazz Age.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### History of the Area<sup>1</sup>

The southernmost tip of Manhattan is the oldest inhabited part of the island. It was so densely built up that early in the city's history, the areas adjacent to the shore facing the East River began to be filled in to create more useable land.<sup>2</sup> On the west side, this process did not begin until 1835, when a devastating fire created the need for a place to deposit the resulting debris, causing prominent landowners from the area to petition the city to have West Street extended southward from Cedar Street to the Battery. Thus the entire block of West Street, from Battery Place to Morris Street (where the Downtown Athletic Club is located), is built upon landfill in the Hudson River; in accordance with the terms of certain water grants made earlier by the city.<sup>3</sup> The earliest occupants of this newly-created area constructed individual buildings (houses, store and dwellings, stables, or tenements) on standard 25-foot lots. Over the course of the nineteenth century, as lower Manhattan became a strictly commercial area, piers were built around the rim of Manhattan island, and ownership of this block of West Street began to change from individuals to realty and warehouse companies. These new owners purchased numerous small lots and assembled larger parcels to accommodate new, larger industrial and office buildings.<sup>4</sup> The lots on which the Downtown Athletic Club Building was constructed were purchased by the Whitehall Realty Company (a large landholder in the area) in 1909. They were resold to the Downtown Athletic Club in 1927, for its headquarters.<sup>5</sup>

### The Downtown Athletic Club

The Downtown Athletic Club was founded in 1926 as a membership association providing convenient recreational facilities for men, primarily lawyers and businessmen who worked in lower Manhattan. First located in the Singer Building at 149 Broadway, the expanding club soon purchased six lots in the middle of the block south of Morris Street, facing West and Washington Streets. By 1928, according to club president and financier, Schuyler Van Vechten Hoffman, the club had 1,000 members and was planning a 44-story building, which was to include (among other facilities) a full, 18-hole golf course. The first published design by Starrett & Van Vleck showed a classically-detailed, pyramid-topped tower similar to other early work by the firm.<sup>6</sup> Less than a year later, the building had been scaled back to 35 stories and took the simplified, modernistic form of the existing building.

At the opening of the clubhouse in September, 1930, the Downtown Athletic Club claimed 3,286 members, including 1,000 life members.<sup>7</sup> The club had its own manager, athletic director, and boxing instructor, and facilities in the new building included a swimming pool; miniature golf course; racquet, squash, and tennis courts; bowling alleys; and billiard rooms; as well as 143 sleeping rooms and several dining rooms.<sup>8</sup>

### Starrett & Van Vleck<sup>9</sup>

Goldwin Starrett (1874-1918)

Ernest Allen Van Vleck (1875-1956)

Goldwin Starrett was one of five brothers active in construction and architecture. Born in Lawrence, Kansas, he grew up in Chicago, and attended the engineering school of the University of Michigan, graduating in 1894. Starrett then followed the path of his two older brothers, entering the architectural offices of D.H. Burnham & Co., where he rose to become one of Burnham's principal assistants. In 1898 Goldwin Starrett joined his brother Theodore at the New York firm of George A. Fuller Construction Company, as superintendent and assistant manager. Goldwin, along with brothers Theodore, Ralph, and William A., formed the Thompson-Starrett Construction Company in 1901. He was the architect for several buildings constructed by this firm, including the Algonquin Hotel (1902, a designated New York City Landmark), and the Hahne Department Store in Newark, New Jersey. Goldwin Starrett spent four years with the E. B. Ellis Granite Company in Vermont, supplying this fine white stone to such important buildings as the Woolworth Building (1910-13, a designated New York City Landmark) and Union Station in Washington, D.C.

In 1907 Ernest Allen Van Vleck joined Starrett to form the firm of Starrett & Van Vleck. A native of Bell Creek, Nebraska, Van Vleck received an architectural degree from Cornell University in 1897, followed by a traveling fellowship in Europe. Van Vleck continued the firm under the same name after Goldwin Starrett's death in 1918. In his obituary Van Vleck was credited with the design of the firm's later buildings.<sup>10</sup>

About 1908, Orrin Rice was admitted to the architectural partnership, and from 1913 to 1918, William A. Starrett was also a partner in the firm. At this time it was known as Starrett & Van Vleck and specialized (although not exclusively) in commercial buildings and schools. In New York, the firm also created large retail buildings for some of the city's finest stores, including the Lord & Taylor department

store (1914), the Saks Fifth Avenue department store (1922-24, a designated New York City Landmark), a major expansion of Bloomingdales department store (1930), and the Abraham and Strauss department store in downtown Brooklyn (1929). Starrett & Van Vleck designed numerous office buildings, many of which are still extant, including a new facade for the Curb (now American Stock) Exchange Building (1930), the Equitable Life Assurance Society Building (1922-23, 393 Seventh Avenue), the Canadian Pacific Building on Madison Avenue (1919-20), and the Royal Insurance Building on Canal Street (1927), as well as apartment houses at 820 and 817 Fifth Avenue (located within the Upper East Side Historic District), the Everett Building (1908, a designated New York City Landmark), and numerous school buildings in New York City and its suburbs.

In their earlier work, such as the Lord & Taylor and Saks stores and the large office buildings such as that for the Equitable Life Assurance Society, Starrett & Van Vleck used a more conservative, Renaissance Revival style, typical of the popular designs of that period. Beginning about 1929, the style of the firm's work changed radically, exemplified by the Bloomingdale's addition, the Brooklyn Abraham & Strauss store, the Curb Exchange, 21 West Street, and the Downtown Athletic Club. The work of this period reflected the modernistic designs seen in contemporary Art Deco skyscrapers, with an emphasis on finely executed brickwork and structurally-derived ornament. A link between these two seemingly distinct styles can be found in the National Association Building (8 West 40th Street, demolished).<sup>11</sup> In 1920, critic John Boyd Taylor called this recently-completed mid-block structure "one of the most beautiful business buildings in New York, in its tower-like aspect, exquisite outlines, fineness of scale and beautifully blended color of light tan brick and limestone details that fuse like a pattern of tapestry in the upper portions."<sup>12</sup>

#### New York Architecture in the 1920s

The years 1925 to 1931 were a time of tremendous building and growth in New York City. During 1925, fifteen new office skyscrapers were erected, and during 1926, thirty more towers were built. 1929 and 1930 were the peak years for the construction of office buildings in the Art Deco style.<sup>13</sup> Despite the crash of the stock market, those buildings which had been previously planned and financed went forward. Large skyscrapers dating to those years included the Empire State Building (1929-31, 350 Fifth Avenue, a designated New York City Landmark), the Chrysler Building (1928-30, 405 Lexington Avenue, a

designated New York City Landmark), and the Daily News Building (1929-30, 220 East 42nd Street, a designated New York City Landmark) in midtown, and the Manhattan Company Building (1929-30, 40 Wall Street, a designated New York City Landmark), the City Bank-Farmers Trust Company Building (1930-31, 20 Exchange Place, a designated New York City Landmark) and the Irving Trust Building (1929-32, 1 Wall Street) downtown. Infrastructure improvements in various parts of the city spurred new development. The demolition of the Second Avenue Elevated paved the way for Tudor City on the east side, and the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel in lower Manhattan made travel between Manhattan and Brooklyn easier while eliminating much east-west traffic in lower Manhattan, near the site of this West Street building.

#### Art Deco Style<sup>14</sup>

The Art Deco or modernistic style of architecture appeared in this country primarily from the mid-1920s through the 1930s and has been called an "avant-garde traditionalist"<sup>15</sup> approach to creating a contemporary idiom for buildings of that period. As in other self-consciously modern periods, designers and critics expressed the need for a new style which would be appropriate for the "Jazz Age," and all its accompanying technological developments. Much of the architecture known as Art Deco, however, was based on accepted, standard forms and construction techniques, which were given a modern cast through the use of a characteristic ornament and a variety of materials, some new and some simply used in a new way. Most of the architects active in this style received traditional Beaux-Arts training emphasizing the plan and elevations as the first and most important phases in the design of a building. To these initial steps were added design and ornamental ideas which evolved from numerous influences including: the Paris 1925 Exposition International des Arts Decoratifs, the well-publicized designs of the Vienna Secessionists and the Wiener Werkstatte, the German Expressionists, as well as American architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan, contemporary theatrical set designs, and Mayan and other Native American forms.

The overall shape of tall buildings of this period came about as a result of the 1916 Building Zone Resolution of New York which decreed setbacks at various levels to allow light and air to reach the lower stories of buildings in an increasingly dense city. 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. These dramatic renderings, published in *Pencil Points* (1923) and in *Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929), significantly influenced contemporary architects. 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."<sup>16</sup> The zoning law provided architects with a sound, rational basis for the form of the skyscraper as well as a new source of creativity; historical styles did not seem to express this modern sensibility and consequently, a new "skyscraper style" emerged in the 1920s. Major characteristics of the new style, as generated in part by the zoning restrictions, were sculpted massing, bold setbacks, and ornament subordinated to the overall mass. The dramatic rendering style of Ferriss and others articulated this new modernist aesthetic. In addition, an emphasis on the verticality of the tall building came from Eliel Saarinen's influential second-prize winning competition entry for the Chicago Tribune Building in 1923.

At the same time, the surfaces of these new buildings were treated with minimal depth, literally as a skin around the framework. This idea came from the architects of the Chicago School, which in turn can be traced back to the writings of German architect Gottfried Semper (1803-1879). In an essay he included as one of the four basic components of architecture the "enclosure of textiles, animal skins, wattle or any other filler hung from the frame or placed between the supporting poles."<sup>17</sup> This led to the idea of walls being treated like woven fabric, a technique used on several buildings in New York during this period, including the Film Center Building by Ely Jacques Kahn (1928-29, 630 Ninth Avenue, a designated New York City Interior Landmark). New materials such as metal alloys were used, but brick and terra cotta were favorites because of their wide range of color and textural possibilities. Buildings were conceived as stage sets for daily living and were treated as such, with entrances taking on the form and function of the proscenium, a treatment reinforced by the fabric-like appearance of the walls. Ornament, usually in low relief and concentrated primarily on the entrances, took the form of angular, geometric shapes such as zigzags and zigzags, or simplified and stylized floral patterns, parts of circles, or faceted crystalline shapes. 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 reassessment

in the 1960s and 1970s this "modernistic" style had achieved the popular name of Art Deco after the 1925 Paris Exposition.

#### Design of the Downtown Club Building

The Downtown Athletic Club building, like its neighbor at 21 West Street, was a product of Starrett & Van Vleck's modernistic, Art Deco period. Designed shortly before 21 West Street, the architects clearly considered the effect of these two towers on each other as well as on the skyline of lower Manhattan. Both buildings extend through the block from West to Washington Streets, although the athletic club sits back farther from both street lines creating limited southern exposures for the office building next door. The brick colors are not the same but complement each other as do the setback heights, and the juxtaposition of the less complicated design of the Downtown Athletic Club Building with the greater variety of angles and lines at the 21 West Street Building creates a dynamic statement of the modernist aesthetic.

At 35 stories, the Athletic Club is the tallest structure on the blockfront, and its height is emphasized by the continuous piers formed between the vertically-grouped windows and by the series of setbacks creating taller and narrower building sections. The variety of functions in the building is reflected in the different blocks created by the setbacks. The four lowest stories are closest to the lot line, with broad doorways and awnings providing a welcome. On the interior at this level public reception rooms and club offices were located, with game and billiard rooms at the third story. Immediately above this, the building sets back to form its largest block, which houses most of the athletic facilities: floors four through the twelfth mezzanine originally had handball and squash courts, a bowling alley, a miniature golf course, a gym, a pool, various locker and dressing rooms, and related mechanical equipment. Some floors, such as those with the squash courts, have no windows. The windows that exist on other floors are slightly inset, with dark, decorative metal spandrels creating a vertical link and continuous brick piers between them. On the thirteenth through the fifteenth stories the grill, the kitchens and the main dining room were placed, and a greenhouse was constructed over the outdoor balcony at the fifteenth story. Although the building sets back above this, floors 16 through 19 housed mechanical equipment, lounges and private dining rooms. On floors 20 through 35, there were individual hotel-type bedrooms, indicated by smaller, evenly spaced windows on the facade. A service stairway is in the northeast corner of

the building and the top three floors have mechanical equipment and the water tank.

The idea of an athletic club in a skyscraper, with different functions on each floor, has been called “the apotheosis of the Skyscraper as instrument of the Culture of Congestion.”<sup>18</sup> This building was called the ultimate machine for living, encouraging desirable forms of human intercourse and the pursuit of bodily perfection.

The building is faced in mottled orange brick which serves as a foil for the varied colors and designs of its neighbor to the north. The fine brickwork, seen in the corbelling around the entrances, the window recesses, and the open work at the roof parapets create an elegant yet subtle design. Other textural variations are formed by setting the brick vertically in some sections and by stylized columns (around the main entrances) of brick set at angles to the plane of the facade. The brick is relieved by light stone sills and parapet caps and dark lead and zinc spandrels whose chevron designs were a common jazz-age motif.

#### Club History

John Heisman, former coach of Georgia Tech’s “Golden Tornado” football team was the club’s first athletic director. In 1935, club member Willard Prince proposed the idea of a club-sponsored award for the year’s outstanding college football player, decided by sports writers and broadcasters, with no influence by the club or its members. While the prize was first named for the Downtown Athletic Club, it was renamed in Heisman’s honor after his death in 1936 and has developed into a coveted trophy, awarded every year.

The club needed to attract a membership of more than 5,000 to support its large building and many programs. Because the club relied on lawyers, bankers and those involved with downtown businesses, its membership and prosperity have reflected Wall Street’s financial reversals. In 1936, with 3,500 members, the Downtown Athletic Club filed for bankruptcy. As a result of reorganization, the club lost control of its building to the General Realty and Utilities Corporation. The building was sold again in 1947 and repurchased in 1950. The recession of the early 1990s also decreased the club’s membership rolls considerably.<sup>19</sup>

In 1977, the biggest change in club operations occurred when the membership voted to admit women, both to reflect the changing population of Wall Street workers and to increase the overall membership numbers.<sup>20</sup>

Other changes over the years have been restricted to updating and modernizing the interiors. An example

was a redesign of the main restaurant to include a bar, after the repeal of Prohibition.<sup>21</sup> In 1952, the dining room on the fifteenth story was extended forward to meet the front wall of the building on the West Street facade.

Although the Club has existed and provided athletic facilities and other services to its members for more than 70 years, it has often faced financial difficulties. Currently, for similar reasons, plans are underway for the upper floors of the building to be converted into residential condominiums, leaving the Club with the lower floors.<sup>22</sup>

#### Description

Thirty-five stories high, the Downtown Athletic Club Building rises through a series of setbacks to stand significantly taller than its two neighbors. With two main facades facing West and Washington Streets, the tops of its north and south facades (with fenestration patterns similar to the other sides) are also visible. The building is faced with mottled orange brick and carries decorative metal and glass panels above the two main entries and on the spandrels beneath many windows, which have steel, double-hung sash. The window sills and parapet caps are of limestone, and the building sits on a granite base.

#### **West Street Facade**

*Base:* The four-story base runs across the full width of the lot. An over-scaled central entrance is formed by a broad band of vertically-laid bricks which projects above the base and is supported by two sets of three stylized columns created by projecting bricks. These columns rise above a high granite base which is ornamented on each side by a round bronze medallion with the club emblem. The ensemble forms a type of grand entablature within which is the large doorway opening, which at the time of designation, was blocked by a construction shed. The opening is crowned by a flat metal marquee with standing gold letters stating the name of the club and a non-historic fabric canopy extends beneath the marquee, across the full width of the sidewalk. Above the marquee and within the entablature, is a large window opening, divided by metal mullions into twelve parts. Each section displays multi-toned brown glass in a chevron pattern. Above this window are several rows of corbelled bricks leading to a flat stone panel which in turn, is also topped by brick corbelling.

There are two bays to each side of this grand entrance with single windows that are slightly recessed and linked vertically by plain brick piers. The windows at the second story have vertical metal casement sash and those above have double-hung metal sash. Beneath

the second story windows, the projecting bricks simulate columns which rise from the base to the sill level at the second and fourth bays and to the level of the second story at the first and fifth bays. Above the third story windows is a broad parapet faced with vertically-set brick, capped with limestone. A granite cornerstone is located in the southernmost corner of this facade, engraved with the date 1929.

*Mid-section:* The building sets back at the fourth story to the fifteenth story. The northern bay of this section is distinct from the rest of this facade and continues straight through the fifteenth story, with a series of small, plain paired windows which have slightly recessed spandrels and are linked vertically from the fourth story mezzanine through the fifteenth story. (There are no windows at the sixth-story mezzanine and the fifteenth-story windows do not have recessed spandrels.) The rest of the facade of this section is evenly divided into five bays. There are no windows on the fourth and sixth story mezzanine levels. At the fifth story each bay contains a grated opening formed in brick. At the seventh through the thirteenth stories the windows are inset slightly in the brick and linked vertically by decorative metal spandrel panels bearing a chevron motif. The spandrels at the eighth and twelfth story mezzanine levels are glass, with a matching chevron design. There are plain brick spandrels at the fourteenth and fifteenth stories, and the fifteenth story has a non-historic greenhouse which was added to enclose the balcony outside this level.

The building sets back again from West Street at the sixteenth story, which houses mechanical equipment and has three small windows for ventilation. This section goes from the sixteenth to the twenty-fifth story, with a smaller block on each side. (That on the south side extends through the eighteenth mezzanine story and that on the north through the twentieth story.) The four central bays on floors seventeen through twenty-five are comprised of recessed, vertically-linked windows with decorative spandrels. A parapet at the twenty-sixth floor has limestone caps.

The upper section of the building is indicated by another setback at the twenty-sixth floor. The four recessed, vertically-linked window bays continue from the twenty-sixth through the thirty-fourth story. The decorative spandrels continue on this section, with a slight variation of motif between the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth stories.

*Top:* The thirty-fifth story caps the building. A narrow brick band distinguishes this floor, which also has decorative brick chevrons on the piers between each of the four bays. The parapet above this floor has alternating sections of solid and angled brick and is

topped by limestone caps. A smaller tower located over the northern part of the building houses mechanical equipment and a water tank. It is ornamented by three recessed brick panels on each of its four facades and is capped by similar brickwork on its parapet.

#### **Washington Street Facade**

*Base:* The Washington Street entrance is similar to but less elaborate than the entrance on West Street. Centered within the four-story base is a slightly projecting, three-story, central entrance bay. A large doorway with a revolving door is topped by a metal marquee and a non-historic fabric awning as on the West Street facade. Above the doorway at the second story, is a three-section opening containing a metal grating fronted by a series of metal chevrons. This section is topped by a series of corbelled bricks and flanked by paired stylized columns, formed by angled bricks, resting on a high granite base. A broad brick panel, effectively an entablature, crowns the whole entry area.

The sections to each side of the doorway are simple, two small windows on the first story and a window and a ventilating grate at the second story on the south. On the northern side is a garage entrance topped by an opening with brick grating at the second story. A series of seven small windows is at the third story, with three in the central bay and two on each side. Continuous stone sills link the windows of each section.

*Mid-section:* The building sets back from the fourth story through the sixteenth story, with a separate bay on the northern side of this facade which continues in the same plane through the twentieth story. Centered in this side bay at each level (from the fifth to the nineteenth stories) is a single, small window with a stone sill. These windows are joined vertically by slightly-recessed brick spandrels. The larger part of this section is faced with a plain brick wall from the fourth through the seventh stories, interrupted only by five brick gratings at the fifth story. Beginning at the seventh story, there are five bays of windows, slightly inset in the brick, and joined vertically by ornamental spandrels through the fourteenth story. The spandrels at the eighth and twelfth mezzanine levels are of glass in a matching chevron design. The fifteenth story is marked by taller windows and a continuous stone sill and thin stone cornice. The sixteenth story houses mechanical equipment and has five grated openings for ventilation in a plain wall.

The next setback begins at the seventeenth story, with an irregular glass railing at the edge of the balcony. From the seventeenth through the twenty-eighth stories, the building has four bays of vertical

rows of windows, capped by a stone at the parapet of the twenty-ninth story.

The final setback goes from the twenty-ninth story through the thirty-fifth story. The vertical rows of windows continue through the thirty-fourth story, stopped by a horizontal brick band.

*Top:* The thirty-fifth story carries the same patterns and ornament as on the West Street facade. The narrow tower for the mechanical equipment and water tower is visible on this side of the building.

**North Facade:** Most of this facade is plain brick and not visible because of the building to the north at 21 West Street. Above this neighboring structure, a few windows are visible, and the water tower displays the same ornament as on the other facades.

**South Facade:** The lower floors of this facade are now obscured by the 1960s addition to the Whitehall Building. Where the Downtown Athletic Club Building rises over its neighbor, the fenestration patterns are similar to the other facades.

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#### NOTES

1. For early development patterns along the shoreline, see Ann L. Buitenhuis, *Manhattan Water-Bound* (New York: New York University Press, 1987) and Helen Worden, *Round Manhattan's Rim* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1934).
2. This did not occur at the same time on the city's west side because the water there was much deeper and it was more difficult to build piers in such deep water. In addition, the west side was more developed with homes and businesses other than shipping.
3. "West St. Building Has No Basement," *The New York Times* (Dec. 7, 1930), Sec. II, 18:2.
4. For example, the massive Whitehall Building, developed by the Whitehall Realty Company as a speculative office building on the southern end of the block, was built in two stages, beginning in 1902-03, with a nineteen-story section facing Battery Place designed by Henry J. Hardenbergh. The architectural firm of Clinton & Russell then designed a thirty-one story addition, built in 1909-11. According to Sarah Bradford Landau and Carl Condit in *Rise of the New York Skyscraper* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 329, seventeen older structures were demolished to make way for this section of the building.
5. New York County Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3603, pages 353, "Downtown Athletic Club, New York City," *Architecture and Building* 63 (Jan., 1931), p. 5. 354, and 352, June 24, 1927.
6. *The New York Times* (March 25, 1928), 3:2.
7. Walter L. Conwell, president of the Safety Car Heating and Lighting Company was club president at the time.
8. In a contemporary magazine article, "Downtown Athletic Club, New York City," *Architecture and Building* 63 (Jan., 1931), p. 5, the interior decorations and furnishings were compared to rooms on a steamship and considered to be the finest high style of the period. They were specially designed by interior designers Duncan Hunter and Barnet Phillips in a variety of treatments and color schemes which all "blended into a single esthetic." The interiors of this building are not under consideration for landmark designation.
9. The information in this section comes primarily from the research files of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Starrett & Van Vleck*; and LPC, *The Everett Building Designation Report (LP-1540)* (NY: City of New York, 1988).
10. "E. A. Van Vleck, An Architect," *NYT* (Aug. 8, 1956).
11. Under the entry for "Goldwin Starrett" in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, Starrett is given credit for the design of this building. It notes, "On the completion of this building William R. Mead (q.v.) of McKim, Mead & White, remarked: 'He has beaten us all in office building design.' "

12. John Boyd Taylor, "The New York Zoning Resolution and Its Influence Upon Design," *The Architectural Record* 48 (September 1920), p. 213.
13. In the "Selected List" of Art Deco buildings, in Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style, Art Deco New York* (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), there are 27 buildings listed for 1929 and 1931 buildings listed for 1930.
14. Much of the information in this section is adapted from: Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Barclay-Vesey Building* LP-1745 (New York: City of New York, 1991), report prepared by David Breiner; LPC, *The Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company* LP-1747 (New York: City of New York, 1991), report prepared by David Breiner; LPC, *Western Union Building* LP-1749 (New York: City of New York, 1991), report prepared by Betsy Bradley; Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Art Deco Style," *Skyscraper Style, Art Deco New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); David Gebhard, *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America* (NY: Preservation Press, 1996), and the Landmarks Preservation Commission research files.
15. Bletter, 41.
16. Corbett, "Architecture," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 2 (Chicago, 1929), p. 275, quoted in LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building*, 4.
17. Bletter, 61.
18. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, (Rotterdam, the Netherlands: 010 Publishers, 1978), p. 152.
19. "Athletic Club Files Plans to Reorganize," *NYT* (Apr. 17, 1936), 23; "Mortgage Granted Club," *NYT* (Aug. 20, 1936), 24; "Downtown Club Plan," *NYT* (May 4, 1937), 51; "A Home for Heisman Trophy in Its Art Deco Interior," *NYT* (Jan. 12, 1997); "The Hotel Ansonia To Be Modernized," *NYT* (May 8, 1950), 31; "No More Free Brunch," *NYT* (Jan 1, 1992), 33.
20. "Downtown Athletic Club Admits Women," *NYT* (Dec. 20, 1977), 41. This change required some interior renovations, specifically the construction of women's locker rooms.
21. New York City Department of Buildings, Alteration 267-1934.
22. Dean E. Murphy, "Condos to Rise Above the Heisman Trophy," (*NYT*, Aug. 24, 2000).



## 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 Downtown Athletic Club Building has a special character, and 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 Downtown Athletic Club Building, constructed in 1929-30, is an outstanding example of an Art Deco skyscraper, a building type from this period which helped define the New York City skyline; that the building was designed by the prolific architectural firm of Starrett & Van Vleck, which was responsible for the design of numerous office, school and retail buildings in New York City and its environs; that the Downtown Athletic Club Building was begun shortly before the office building next door at 21 West Street, and the two buildings complement each other with their similar modernistic style, typical of the later work of this architectural firm; that the design of the Downtown Athletic Club Building is representative of contemporary Art Deco designs, in which architects tried to create a new stylistic expression to represent the Jazz Age, while its boxy shape and variety of setbacks were in direct response to the 1916 Building Zone Resolution and the requirements for its athletic facilities; that the fine brickwork exemplified by the corbelling around the entrances and the window reveals, as well as the chevron designs on the metal spandrel panels are illustrative of the finest efforts of architects of this style; that the building was constructed for the membership association, the Downtown Athletic Club, which was formed in 1926 to provide athletic and club facilities in close proximity to members' workplaces; that the high cost of land in lower Manhattan required the unusual situation of a high-rise athletic club, with areas for different sports on different floors, as well as other floors for dining rooms and residential quarters; that, beginning in 1935, the Club began to award a prize for the year's outstanding college football player, which later became known as the Heisman Trophy, an honor which has become more highly coveted through the years; that despite years of economic uncertainty, the Downtown Athletic Club, in this distinctive building, has continued to provide recreational and social benefits to its members for over 70 years.

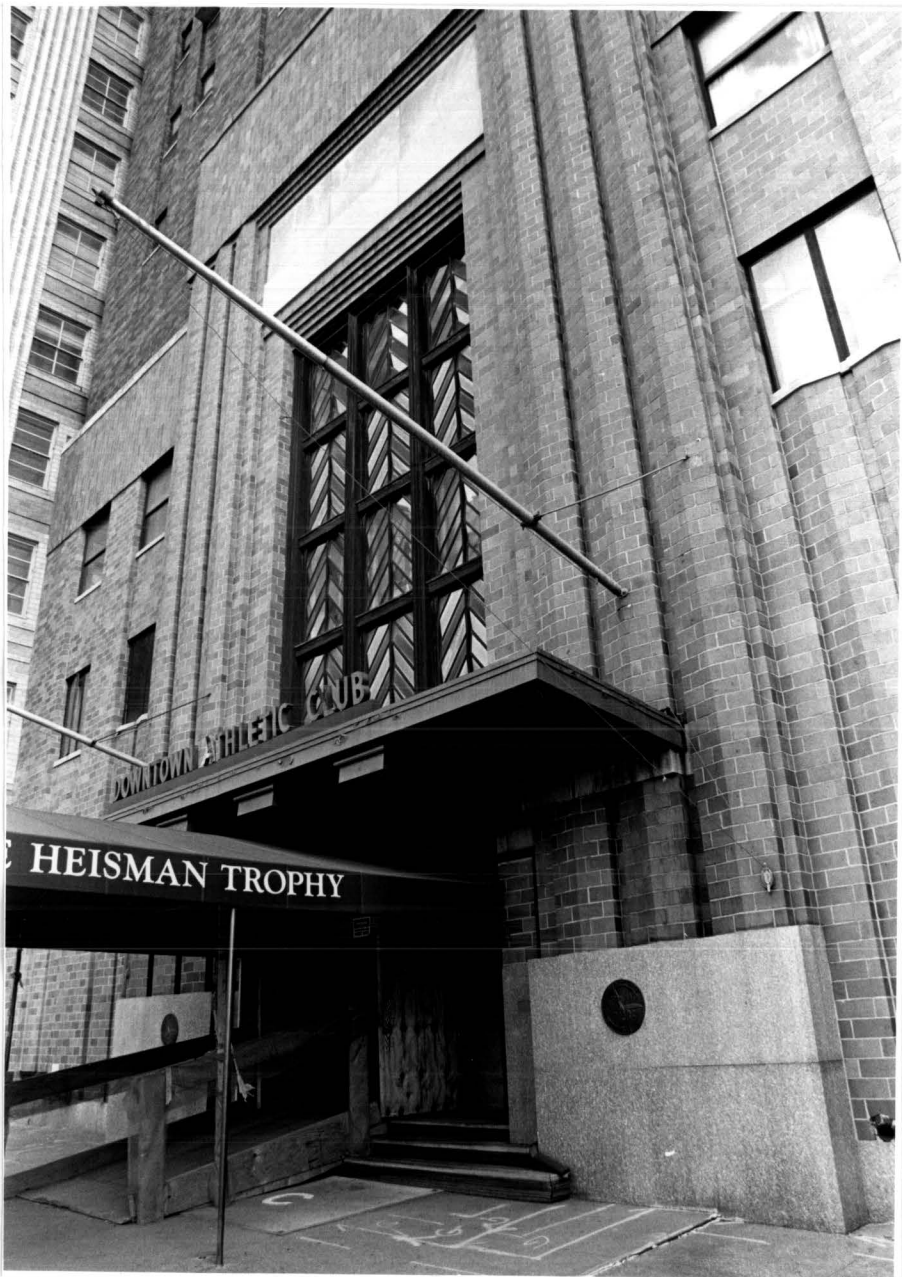
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Downtown Athletic Club Building, 19 West Street (aka 18-20 West Street and 28-32 Washington Street), and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 15, Lot 19 as its Landmark Site.



Downtown Athletic Club Building  
19 West Street, Manhattan  
West Street facade  
*Photo: Carl Forster*



Downtown Athletic Club Building  
19 West Street, Manhattan  
Washington Street facade  
*Photo: Carl Forster*

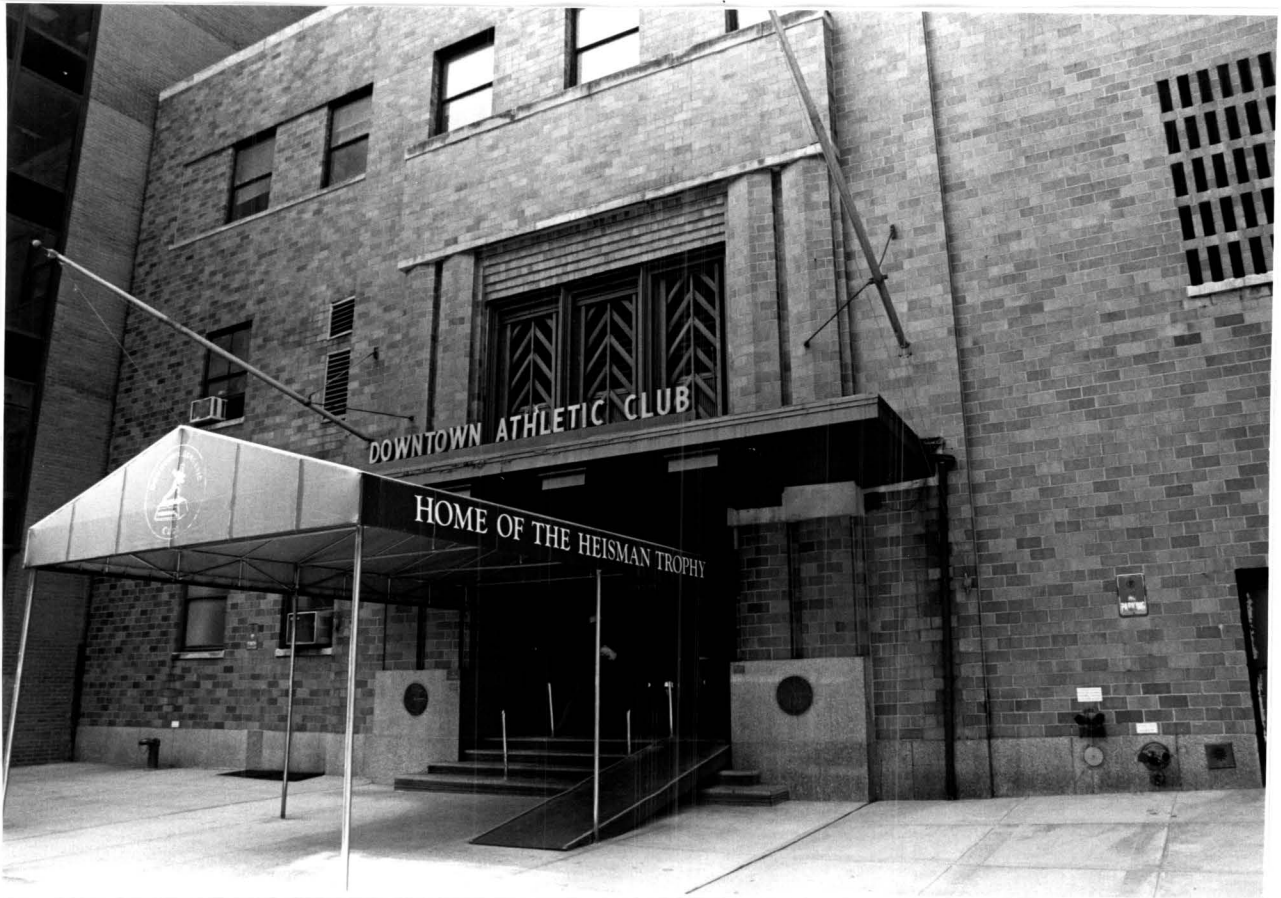


Ground story details, West Street



Upper story details, West Street

Downtown Athletic Club Building  
*Photos: Carl Forster*



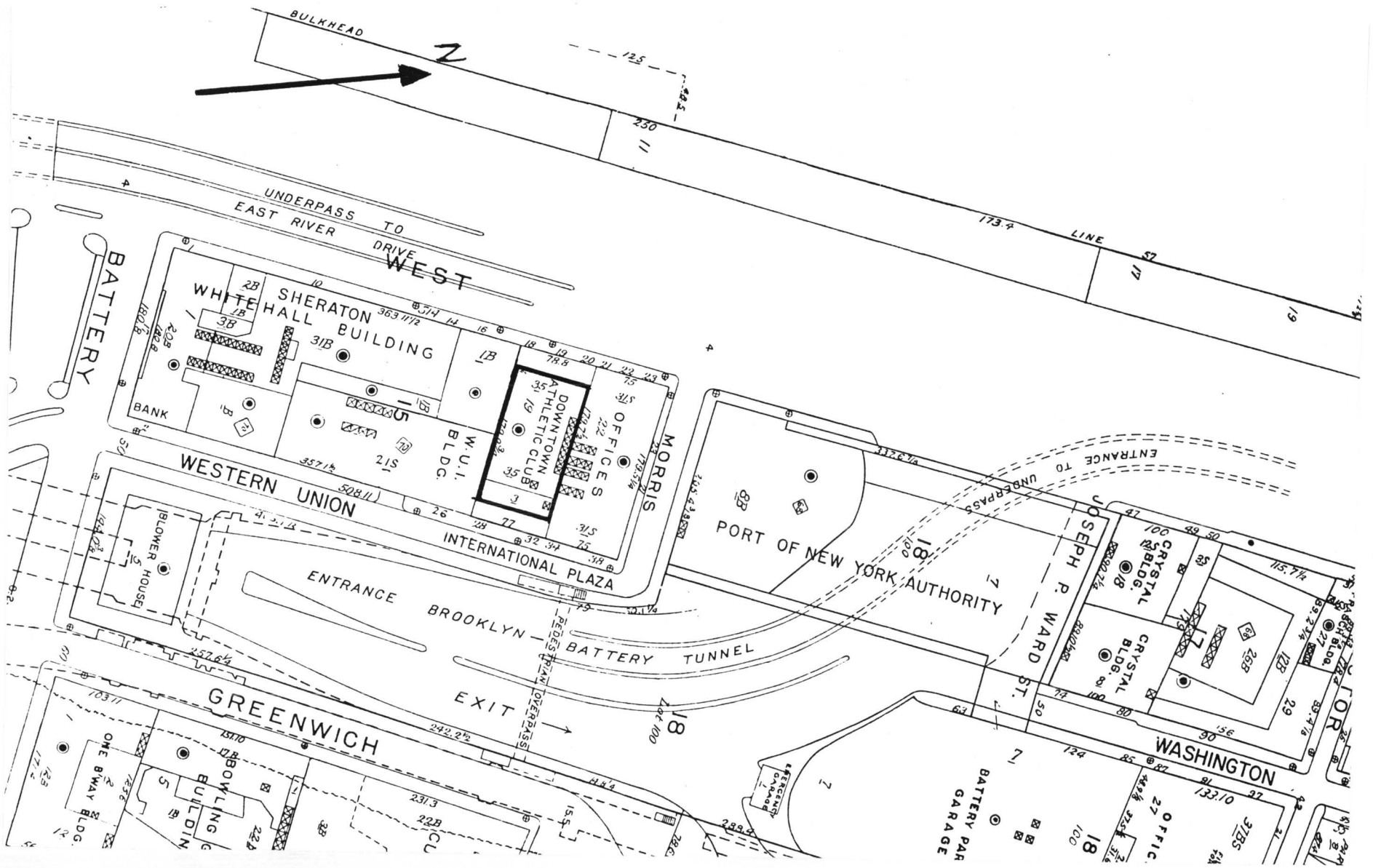
Downtown Athletic Club Building  
Ground story details, Washington Street facade



Downtown Athletic Club Building  
Roof details, West Street facade

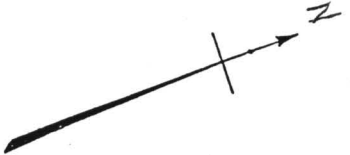


Downtown Athletic Club Building  
Facade details, Washington Street  
*Photos: Carl Forster*

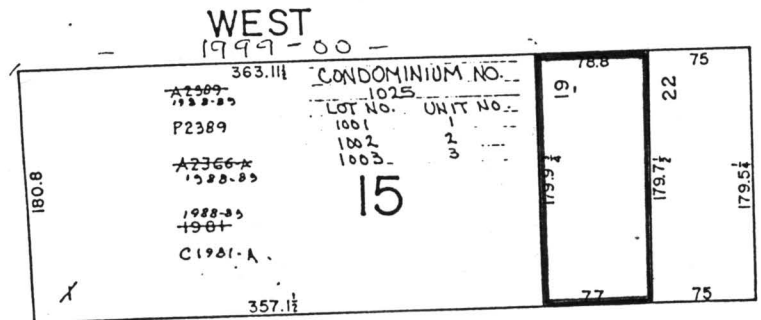


Downtown Athletic Club Building  
 19 West Street (aka 18-20 West Street and 28-32 Washington Street), Manhattan  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 15, Lot 19  
 Source: *Sanborn Manhattan Landbook*, 1999-2000, Plate 2

SEE PAGE 10A



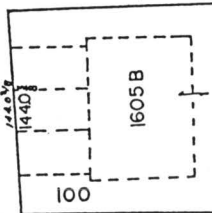
BATTERY PL.



WESTERN UNION INTERNATIONAL PLAZA

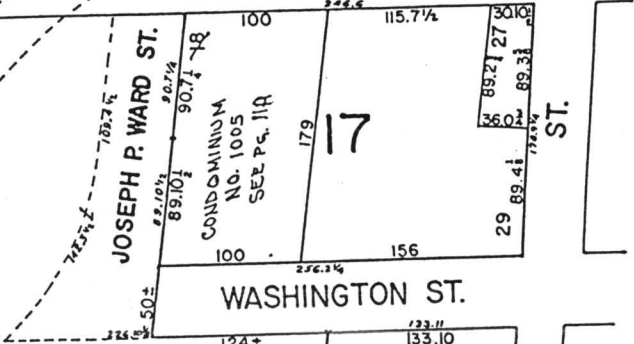
MORRIS ST.

PL.



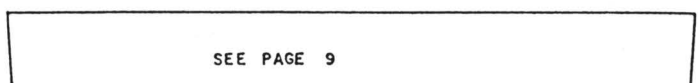
GREENWICH ST.

18

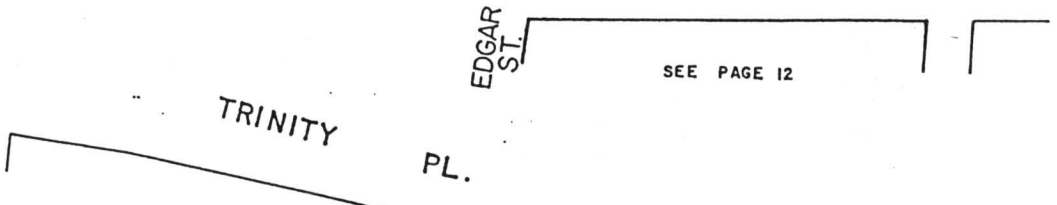


WASHINGTON ST.

RECTOR ST.



SEE PAGE 9



SEE PAGE 12

Downtown Athletic Club Building  
 19 West Street, (aka 18-20 West Street and 28-32 Washington Street), Manhattan  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 15, Lot 19  
 Source: Department of finance, City Surveyor, Tax map