

**ONE CHASE MANHATTAN PLAZA** (aka 16-48 Liberty Street, 26-40 Nassau Street, 28-44 Pine Street, 55-77 William Street). Built 1957-64; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architect, Gordon Bunshaft, partner in charge of design, Jacques E. Guiton, lead designer.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 44, Lot 1.

On June 24, 2008, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a hearing on the proposed designation of One Chase Manhattan Plaza and the proposed designation of the related Landmark site (Item No. 12). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with provision of law. Seven people testified in support of designation, including the building's owner J. P. Morgan Chase, as well as representatives of City Council member Alan J. Gerson, United States Representative Jerrold Nadler, DoCoMoMo New York Tri-State, the Historic Districts Council, the Modern Architecture Working Group, and the Municipal Art Society.

### Summary

Faced with shimmering panels of natural color and black-enameled aluminum, H-shaped mullions and glass, One Chase Manhattan Plaza is among the largest and most important 20<sup>th</sup> century skyscrapers in New York City.<sup>1</sup> The project was designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (hereafter SOM), with J. Walter Severinghaus as partner in charge, Gordon Bunshaft overseeing the development of the design, and Jacques E. Guiton as lead designer. It was one of the leading architectural firms working in the International Style and had been responsible for such pioneering modern works as Lever House (1950-52) and the Fifth Avenue branch of the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company (1953-54). Chase merged with the Bank of the Manhattan Company in 1955 and the new headquarters was planned to consolidate 8,700 employees under a single roof. David Rockefeller played a leading role in the project; as executive vice president he convinced Chase to remain downtown and hire SOM, resulting in an 813-foot-tall slab-like tower that dramatically altered the skyline and character of the financial district. At that time, few buildings had been constructed downtown since the early



1930s and One Chase Manhattan Plaza signaled a new start for this historic area. Not only did it stand out sharply from its older masonry neighbors, but the planning of the site, incorporating an irregularly shaped 2½ acre plaza, established a welcome break from the narrow, twisting streets that characterize much of the neighborhood. Construction started in 1957 and the tower was mostly complete by 1961. The south plaza and basement levels were dedicated in 1964, incorporating a “Sunken Garden” by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi. Resting 16 feet below the plaza, this serene work of art is visible from above and through curved glass windows that separate it from the bank’s main branch located on the concourse level. Architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable praised the design in the *New York Times*: “These are ambitious structures of character and quality, surrounded by the most expensive urban luxury money can buy – space. In a remarkable duality of purpose, reconcilable only in this commercial age, they aspire to the dual role of company trademark and work of art.” The structure was also described in *Architectural Forum* as “a milestone, perhaps even an end point in the development of the American skyscraper.”<sup>2</sup> As hoped, One Chase Manhattan Plaza did lay significant groundwork for a downtown renaissance in the 1960s, leading to construction of a succession of corporate towers immediately west, from the Marine Midland Bank Building in 1967, to the World Financial Center complex in 1985-88.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Few buildings have had as significant an impact on the character of lower Manhattan as One Chase Manhattan Plaza. Completed in 1964, it was one of the financial district's first buildings to boldly reflect the aesthetic and planning strategies of 20<sup>th</sup> century European modernism, often called the International Style. Rising at the north end of a 2½ acre plaza, the 813-foot-tall tower symbolized the bank's long-standing commitment to the area, leading to the eventual creation of the World Trade Center (1962-73) and the World Financial Center (mid-1980s).

### Chase Manhattan Bank and David Rockefeller

Chase National Bank merged with the Bank of the Manhattan Company in April 1955, making it the second largest financial institution in the nation, with \$8 billion in assets and 87 domestic branches. Both shared strong ties to lower Manhattan and had been founded a short distance from the site. The Bank of Manhattan, for instance, first served depositors in 1799 where 40 Wall Street stands today and Chase was founded at 104 Broadway, near Cedar Street, by banker and publisher John Thompson in 1877. Named for Salmon P. Chase, secretary of the U. S. Treasury under President Abraham Lincoln, it grew to become the largest bank in the world by 1930. In the late 1940s, however, National City Bank and the Bank of America National Trust and Savings (later Citibank and Bank of America) surpassed Chase and the *New York Times* commented that following such success it was not easy for the bank "to take a back seat, much less than stay in it."<sup>3</sup>

Six months following the merger, in November 1955, Chase Manhattan Bank announced plans to erect a new headquarters. John J. McCloy was the bank's president (1953-55), and later, chairman (1956-60). Trained as a lawyer, he had been assistant secretary of war under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and headed the World Bank from 1947 to 1949. To supervise the project, in January 1955 he promoted David Rockefeller (b. 1915) to executive vice president for planning and development. Rockefeller had first joined the bank as a manager in 1946. His parents, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, were major philanthropists, having played leading roles in the creation of many familiar New York City structures, such as Riverside Church, Rockefeller Center, and the Museum of Modern Art. David Rockefeller remained associated with Chase for most of his career, becoming its president in 1960, and chairman of the board and chief executive officer in 1969. He received a gold medal from the Downtown Association in 1956 for his role in planning the new headquarters and also helped found the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association in 1958.<sup>4</sup> Under his leadership, this organization helped plan the South Street Seaport, the World Trade Center, and Battery Park City.

According to Rockefeller, it was he who convinced McCloy to hire a "qualified outside firm," Ebasco Services Incorporated, to evaluate the bank's real estate needs.<sup>5</sup> This consultant prepared several surveys and reports in 1954 and 1955, concluding that a long-term solution was needed – one that would consolidate various banking operations in a single structure. Chase owned seven buildings in the vicinity and Ebasco determined most of these facilities to be substandard. Though the 1954 report did not take a position on where a new headquarters should be erected, it noted the operational advantages of remaining downtown, as well as the current value of the bank's property. A subsequent report evaluated two sites: the "Broad Street block" (bounded by Broad, Wall and William Streets and Exchange Place), as well as the block that Chase would ultimately purchase.

Rockefeller worked closely with William Zeckendorf (1905-1976), a long-time family advisor, to find an ideal location. A prominent real estate developer and broker, he assembled the site of the United Nations and sold it to the United Nations Organizing Committee which received an \$8.5 million gift from John D. Rockefeller for this purchase. He also built such ambitious commercial and residential complexes as Roosevelt Field on Long Island, Mile High Center in Denver, and Kips Bay Plaza in Manhattan. Though Chase contemplated the purchase of various sites, both downtown and elsewhere, it was the pending sale of the block directly north of the bank's Pine Street headquarters, bounded by Cedar, Nassau, Liberty, and William Streets, that helped finalize their decision. The 60,000 square foot site had been occupied by a Romanesque Revival style structure (Charles W. Clinton, begun 1882) and six other buildings erected by the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York. Vacant since 1950 when the firm

moved to Broadway and 55<sup>th</sup> Street, the block was currently owned by the Guaranty Trust Company of New York.<sup>6</sup> At a hastily-convened meeting with Chase executives at the bank's headquarters in February 1955, Zeckendorf recounted saying:

There is only one logical musical chair open and available to you – I pointed out the window . . . The Mutual Life site is under negotiation for sale and you have no time. You must bid for it today.<sup>7</sup>

As one of the largest sites available in the area, the bank acted without delay, paying \$4.67 million. Chase continued to claim there were “no definite plans for a new head office” but decisive action had been taken and a contract was signed in May 1955 to begin demolition of the entire north block.<sup>8</sup>

### Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

SOM was selected to design Chase Manhattan Plaza in spring 1955. Founded in Chicago in 1936, this architectural firm was responsible for many prominent corporate structures in the United States, including a recently-completed branch of the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company (1953-54, a designated New York City Landmark) located at the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and 43<sup>rd</sup> Street. This aluminum-and-glass walled structure drew strong praise from both architectural critics and depositors, which reportedly tripled in number during the first year of operation. Rockefeller said it was his close friend architect Wallace K. Harrison who “unhesitatingly recommended” SOM.<sup>9</sup> This recollection contrasts sharply with that of Nathaniel A. Owings, who later claimed the firm pursued the job independently and without direct invitation. *Architectural Forum* reported:

Hearing rumors, SOM partners swung into action, called Senior Partner Nat Owings in from San Francisco to ask for a meeting with David Rockefeller.<sup>10</sup>

According to *Chase Manhattan Magazine*, the complex was planned by 4 of the 13 general partners at SOM: Gordon Bunshaft (1909-1990), Edward Mathews (c. 1903-1980), Owings (1903-84), and J. Walter Severinghaus (1905-87). Each member of the firm had different responsibilities and though Owings was one of the firm's founding members, it was Severinghaus who headed the project, with Bunshaft as partner in charge of design. Bunshaft, who supervised many projects simultaneously, assigned it to Jacques E. Guiton (b. 1913-?), who prepared the preliminary scheme in collaboration with Roy O. Allen (d. 1992) during the summer of 1955. Guiton recalled that he was:

. . . dumbfounded when, in June of 1955, one of the partners told me I was going to be the project designer for a new job: the headquarters of Chase Manhattan Bank.<sup>11</sup>

Trained in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Guiton immigrated to the United States in 1948. Briefly employed by the New York architects Leonard Schulze and Walker & Poor, he developed a strong interest in work by French architect Le Corbusier and when he found himself jobless in 1950 decided to approach Bunshaft. Initially, he worked as a draftsman but after designing Chase Manhattan Plaza he worked on the master plan for the Tunis airport in Tunisia, an unbuilt printing plant for the Cleveland Plain Dealer, as well as buildings for various American universities. Following his retirement in 1981, he authored two books: *The Ideas of Le Corbusier on Architecture and Planning* (1981) and *A Life in Three Lands: Memoirs of an Architect* (1991).

As lead designer, Guiton developed at least two massing schemes that were presented to the board of directors in September 1955. These plans were prepared in consultation with Owings, who later “claimed credit for the idea of placing a skyscraper on a small part of a downtown lot.”<sup>12</sup> Rockefeller, however, emphasized Zeckendorf's contributions:

Nat [Owings] and I spent many hours with Bill Zeckendorf discussing the two very different alternatives . . . The second, the one Bill Zeckendorf had envisioned from the beginning, was to combine the two parcels by closing the section of Cedar Street between them and erecting one building – not another massive, hulking office building but a shimmering skyscraper set on a large open plaza.<sup>13</sup>

Though only slightly smaller in terms of square footage than the scheme that proposed separate buildings on each block, it fulfilled Ebasco's recommendation that the new headquarters be "definitive and dramatic."<sup>14</sup> To create an uninterrupted plaza would require the closing of Cedar Street and the approval of the City Planning Commission, headed by chairman Robert Moses. Rockefeller and Moses had been acquainted since the 1930s and he remembered his presentation being an "easy sale . . . Once we had his okay, other approvals came easily."<sup>15</sup>

When a preliminary plan was introduced to the press in November 1955, the *New York Times* and other newspapers compared the project to "Rockefeller Center – plaza and all"– and it was presumed that Cedar Street would be closed and become the site of the plaza. Furthermore, it was "believed that the building would not have the customary setbacks."<sup>16</sup> New details were revealed in December 1955, including a related plan for 750 units of housing sponsored under Title 1 of the Federal Housing Act along several blocks of Water Street, south of Coenties Slip, as well as 1,000-car garage, one block east of the site, between Pearl and Water Streets. President and chairman of the executive committee J. Stewart Baker told stockholders that the bank:

. . . benefitted from the imaginative attitude of New York City authorities toward the redevelopment of the downtown area . . . We have found that the overall concept of our project fits in admirably with their own plans, and they have indicated their willingness to assist us in solving the difficult legal and physical problems involved in our project.<sup>17</sup>

Relatively few buildings had been erected in lower Manhattan since 1930. Aside from office buildings at 99 Church Street (1951, demolished) and 161 William Street (Sylvan Bien, 1952), the most notable structures tended to be associated with transit, namely the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel (1941-50). Financed with public funds, these projects improved automobile access to the area and anticipate the city's strong support for Chase Manhattan Plaza. Mayor Robert Wagner claimed that a coordinated response would assure "the continued supremacy of lower Manhattan as the financial and business center of the world."<sup>18</sup>

On February 8, 1956, SOM filed plans (NB 21-56) with the Department of Buildings, estimating the cost of construction at \$50 million. A considerably higher estimate of \$75 million appeared in the *New York Times*, which may have also included the cost of the plaza.<sup>19</sup> Though much of this figure would be offset by the sale of various structures in the area owned by the bank, in the end the cost of the new headquarters and plaza was significantly more, at least \$138 million.<sup>20</sup>

## Design

One Chase Manhattan Plaza combines three main components: a 60-story tower, a 2½ acre plaza, and a 6-story base, of which 5 floors are beneath grade. To create an uninterrupted site, stretching from Pine to Liberty Street, the City Planning Commission agreed to close a section of Cedar Street, and in exchange, Chase ceded four 8-to-15-foot wide strips of land to enlarge the bordering streets and sidewalks. The bank also agreed to cover the cost of relocating utility lines.<sup>21</sup> It was highly unusual for the city to close a public street for private, commercial use. Such closings had only been previously granted when the public benefits were viewed as substantial, as in the case of the New York Central Railroad and Grand Central Depot (c. 1871, altered) and the Pennsylvania Railroad with Pennsylvania Station (1903-10, altered).<sup>22</sup>

SOM completed its design in early 1956, as both the Seagram Building (Ludwig Mies van de Rohe, with Philip Johnson and Kahn & Jacobs, a designated New York City Landmark and Interior, 1955-58) in Manhattan and SOM's Inland Steel Building (1955-58) in Chicago began construction. Both International Style projects had a significant impact on Chase Manhattan Plaza, influencing the overall shape of the tower, the elegant rectilinear treatment of the glass and metal exteriors, and the structure's relationship to its site. While some earlier New York City apartment complexes had been built in open, park-like spaces to increase tenant access to light and air, Seagram was the first office building in New York City erected as a free-standing tower. Located at the far end of a deep plaza behind twin pools, it quickly became a symbol of corporate sophistication and success.

Chase Manhattan Plaza's tower was positioned on part of the north block, leaving the rest of the site open. Whereas the current zoning code encouraged set-back, ziggurat-like forms that generally filled

entire parcels, a rarely-utilized rule permitted office buildings of unlimited height when all or a portion of the structure covered 25% of the site. Douglass Haskell, writing in *Architectural Forum* in November 1956, praised SOM's design and, in particular, the slab-like tower's uncomplicated form:

. . . it will restore to New York some of the leadership which that metropolis lost when it misled the whole country into building wedding-cake skyscrapers with the setback abomination.<sup>23</sup>

All 60 floors would be the same size, meaning the upper floors would be as large and desirable as those beneath it. This was especially important to the bank, which planned to lease the upper half of the building to outside tenants. Each floor measures 280 by 106 feet, totaling almost 30,000 square feet. This amount exceeded the site coverage permitted by law and Chase applied for a variance (347-56BZ) from the Board of Standards and Appeals. Severinghaus and other executives testified that it was of "vital importance to the efficiency of the applicant's main office operations" and that the benefits to the downtown area would greatly outweigh the increased mass. Their request was granted unanimously in February 1957, resulting in 27.30% site coverage, adding about 700 square feet per floor.<sup>24</sup>

The architects envisioned Chase Manhattan Plaza as a prominent addition to the lower Manhattan skyline. At 813 feet, it was the third tallest building in the financial district, surpassed by only 40 Wall Street (927 feet, a designated New York City Landmark) and the Cities Service Building (950 feet). What it lacked in relative height, however, it made up in volume and Chase would become the largest office building erected in New York City in the past quarter century. To maximize the amount of useable space, SOM employed an unusual system of external three-by-five-foot piers, keeping the number of interior columns to a minimum and concealing the rest within a central elevator and service core. According to the *New York Times*, this technique was "not entirely new" but had never been used in such large structures before, especially office buildings.<sup>25</sup> Projecting from the north and south facades, these large perimeter piers carry much of the building's weight and reflect the firm's increased interest in structural expression. Whereas earlier SOM designs used crisp glass curtain walls to disguise and envelop the structure, in both the Inland Steel Building (1955-58) in Chicago – which began construction shortly before Chase unveiled its model – and here, the main piers are visible and project outside the floor plates, forming a free-standing colonnade at the base where the lobby is recessed sharply from the floors above.

By employing this innovative system, SOM created deep floors of unusual openness. Such arrangements were favored by both owners and tenants. Walls can be positioned freely and the large peripheral columns project outside rather than inside the space. Jane Jacobs wrote in 1957 that:

The Chase Manhattan plan is ideal; the client decided that the expense of exterior columns and 40 foot spans was justified by space economy and flexibility.<sup>26</sup>

The south side of each floor is actually 10 feet deeper than the north, allowing the larger offices to face the plaza, where there are dramatic vistas and greater afternoon light. "Triple bank layouts" such as these were not uncommon but it was somewhat unusual for this arrangement to be asymmetrical.<sup>27</sup>

Chase was also the first building with a glass curtain wall to exceed 800 feet.<sup>28</sup> It has 8,800 plate glass windows, each measuring approximately five-by-eight feet. At the 11<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, and 51<sup>st</sup> floors, however, the fenestration is visibly interrupted by mechanical equipment. Hidden behind both metal louvers and glass, this machinery allowed it to be the "largest fully air-conditioned building in New York."<sup>29</sup> Above the 60<sup>th</sup> floor, massive cooling fans are disguised by a 4-story-tall roof enclosure that functions, in a way, as the building's crown. This prominent feature grows out of the floors below, framed by thin vertical mullions and large perimeter piers, to create the appearance of a box-like, flat roof. At Lever House (1950-52, a designated New York City Landmark), SOM had built one of the first all-glass curtain walls in New York City, but it was Emery Roth & Sons who were first to combine this technique with prefabricated aluminum spandrel panels. Examples that directly precede Chase include the 26-story National Distillers Building at 99 Park Avenue (1952-54), between 39<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Streets, and the Davies Building, 460 Park Avenue (1952-54), at the northwest corner of 57<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>30</sup>

To evaluate the elevations for Chase, SOM erected a single-story mock-up in Roosevelt Field, Long Island, in 1957, testing both aluminum and stainless steel elements. Though both materials “performed well,” *Architectural Forum* reported:

The final decision to use aluminum was made jointly by the architect and client, based partly on their preference for the appearance of the aluminum finish, partly on the comparative cost, and partly on the longer-than-usual guarantee which was offered by the aluminum producers.<sup>31</sup>

The General Bronze Corporation engineered and manufactured the ¼ inch thick aluminum panels, some as tall as 13 feet, which enclose the perimeter piers, as well as the extruded H-shaped aluminum mullions that flank the windows. Between the floors both natural-color and smaller black-porcelain-enameled panels were inserted. To permit “equal on-center spacing of vertical elements,” the panels and windows closest to the perimeter piers are partially concealed and appear less wide.<sup>32</sup>

At the base of the tower, adjoining the plaza, is the main lobby. This 30-foot-tall space is enclosed by plate glass windows that permit views into and through the block-long interior. From outside, one could originally see a mezzanine level occupied by loan officers (removed early 1990s) and the elevator banks, as well as the south facade of the neo-Renaissance facade of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (1924, a designated New York City Landmark) across Liberty Street and other neighboring structures. Such transparency appealed strongly to Rockefeller who later called SOM’s aluminum-and-glass branch for the Manufacturer’s Hanover Trust Company:

. . . a small architectural gem . . . the door to the giant vault – usually the sacred and secret core of the bank, hidden away in the bowels of the building – was visible from the street! But it was the light, almost ethereal quality of the building that caught everyone’s attention.<sup>33</sup>

Visible from all sides, Chase’s lobby is a grand and understated room, with a minimum of architectural detail. As in the lobby of the Seagram Building, the space is dominated by the textured surface of travertine walls that enclose six banks of elevators.

The plaza was intended to be one of the project’s most dramatic and distinctive features. It isolates the tower from its older masonry neighbors and the empty space functions as an elegantly minimal forecourt or, as *Architectural Forum* described it, a “front yard.”<sup>34</sup> Originally constructed with white marble terrazzo paving and enclosed by a solid parapet of white marble travertine that was personally selected by Bunshaft in Tivoli, Italy, the L-shaped plaza levels the sloping site and conceals six floors of operations that would have been difficult to fit into a single floor of the tower, including an auditorium seating 800, the world’s largest bank vault, and a staff cafeteria with the capacity to serve an estimated 10,000 meals a day.<sup>35</sup>

The bank’s main branch or head office was placed on the concourse level. Though set beneath the plaza, this spacious public branch receives natural light from a large oval well, ringed by a glazed barrier. With a diameter of 60 feet, it is positioned on the west side of the south plaza, slightly south of where Cedar Street originally ran. Sixteen feet deep, Severinghaus wrote:

This feature had developed as a solution to the problem of where to put the public banking area, which was too large to be housed in the tower. The obvious location was under the plaza, but due to the adjacent street levels this was essentially a basement floor, which connoted secondary space. The introduction of the circular well brought light into the banking room and made it into prime first-floor space.<sup>36</sup>

Chase promoted its new headquarters as a successor to Rockefeller Center and it seems likely that the circular well was inspired by the sunken rectangular plaza located at the west end of Channel Gardens, between West 50<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> Streets. Both features contain fountains and works of art and were conceived to bring light and people to the lower floors.<sup>37</sup>

Isamu Noguchi, the artist who later created the “Sunken Garden,” served as a consultant on the plaza’s design. Early schemes, dating from 1956, included square- and rectangular-shaped wells in which

a spiral staircase at the southwest corner served as a dramatic entrance to the bank. In 1957, however, the stairs were removed and the rectangle became a circle. Noguchi is often credited with this decision, which produces a gentle contrast between the tower's gridded elevations and the open well.<sup>38</sup> Visible to the public, *Architectural Forum* called it a "show window where bank tellers could look out through the curved glass windows and see gardens."<sup>39</sup>

As originally built, the raised plaza was reached from three marble staircases, each with a different design. The widest and most elaborate stairs is located to the south and adjoins Pine Street. Due to the sloping site, it was designed with a second set of deep cantilevered risers to the east. The west stairs is located near the intersection of Nassau Street and Cedar Street and consists of two elements: a staircase that narrows slightly as it descends to the concourse level and behind it, a wider staircase, which rises onto the plaza. The east stairs descend to where William Street meets Cedar. In early proposals, it paralleled William Street but was likely reoriented to encourage east-west movement by pedestrians through the plaza from what remained of Cedar Street.

### Construction of the Tower

Construction began in January 1957 and proceeded in two interconnected campaigns. The tower was completed in 1961 and the south plaza in 1964. It was an immensely complicated job, involving a great number of contractors and architectural consultants. At each and every stage, the bank found ways to generate media attention. For instance, Walter F. Hough, a long-time employee, "operated the controls of a power shovel to lift the first scoop of earth."<sup>40</sup> Work on the 2½ acre foundations by the Foundation Company of New York; George M. Brewster and Son, Inc. of New Jersey, and the Joseph Miele Construction Co., of New Jersey, began in March 1957 and was completed in November 1958. Excavations, said to be the largest in New York City history, reached a depth of 90 feet and the foundation engineers Moran, Proctor, Mueser & Rutledge developed an innovative system that allowed work in the open (without caissons), injecting gel into sand.

The Turner Construction Company of New York served as general contractor and was responsible for erecting the tower. Weiskopf & Pickworth were the structural engineers. It has 53,000 ton steel frame that was manufactured by the Bethlehem Steel Company. At peak, nearly 1,800 construction workers were active on site.<sup>41</sup> Work began in December 1958 and the structure was topped out less than a year later, in September 1959, as executives and two hundred invited guests watched the ceremonial hoisting of the United States flag by a steelworker from the Mohawk tribe wearing a headdress on closed circuit television.<sup>42</sup> The curtain wall was finished in March 1960. Though a small number of staff began to occupy the building later that year, due to four city-wide strikes by construction workers, the move did not start until January 1961.<sup>43</sup>

### The South Plaza and the "Sunken Garden"

One Chase Manhattan Plaza was formally dedicated on March 17, 1961. At the time, a row of nine mature Hawthorne trees had been planted in circular pits along Nassau Street but work on the south plaza had not yet begun and guests in attendance were required to pass "wreckers demolishing seven adjoining buildings" on the south block.<sup>44</sup> This spacious plaza was mostly complete in December 1963 and staff began to move into what was called the "Plaza Banking Office" in January 1964.<sup>45</sup> To celebrate this milestone, a public party was held on May 7, 1964, enlivened by a band, tumblers, clowns and refreshments. Mayor Robert Wagner attended the noon-time ceremony, as did thousands of area workers.<sup>46</sup>

The south plaza's most conspicuous feature is Isamu Noguchi's "Sunken Garden." At the urging of Bunshaft, the bank had begun to develop a major collection of contemporary art "to enrich and enliven bare walls and large spaces."<sup>47</sup> While the majority of pieces were privately displayed, this unique sculptural work was commissioned for public view. This type of patronage was not uncommon in the late 1950s when large, often colorful, pieces of abstract art were frequently introduced into office building lobbies, bank interiors, restaurants and airline terminals.

Born in California in 1904, Noguchi studied in Paris with the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi during the 1920s. His earliest public work in New York City is located in Rockefeller Center

(begun 1931, a designated New York City Landmark, with some designated interiors). Titled *News*, this stainless steel relief depicts the work of the Associated Press. In subsequent years, he moved away from representational imagery, producing a varied group of stone sculptures with a Japanese spirit, as well as 14 gardens. Bunshaft and Noguchi were frequent collaborators and became close friends. Their earliest project was an unexecuted raised garden for Lever House, followed by a group of square courtyards at the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company Headquarters (1957), near Hartford.

Work on the “Sunken Garden” began in 1961, during the period when Noguchi was planning a courtyard and sculptures for the Beinecke Library at Yale University. These commissions share many characteristics; neither can be entered and, like the Zen Gardens he and Bunshaft visited during a trip to Kyoto a year earlier, were conceived for contemplation.<sup>48</sup> Enclosed by large glass windows, both can be viewed from above or in the round. While both incorporate patterned paving, they differ in shape, form, and materials. The Beinecke courtyard features a level rectangular base, but the garden at Chase was, according to the artist: “sculpturally treated – like the wild and surging shell of the sea and rising out or floating on it would be elemental rocks.”<sup>49</sup>

Noguchi selected seven black basalt rocks of various sizes taken from the bed of the Uji River near Kyoto, Japan. Reportedly weighing one to seven tons, he told the *Herald Tribune* in 1963:

I wish the entire garden to be considered as a modern work of sculpture . . . the rocks I found in Japan for this garden contain a levitating as well as a gravitating quality. Some of them will seem to soar, others, remain close to the earth.<sup>50</sup>

Noguchi supervised the engineering and installation, overseeing 25 construction workers. The undulating surface is raised slightly above the floor in the bank branch and incorporates 27,000 four-inch-square grayish-white granite blocks from Vermont, as well as three fountains of varying character and intensity. A press release reported that these water features were:

. . . made up of 45 vertical pipes which can produce a massive spray, a bubbling effect, or anything in between. The pipes are set in angular “concentric” patterns, with the three inner-most pipes marking the points of an equilateral triangle. The other two fountains consist of two intermediate-size stones, each drilled with two holes – for filling and drainage. These weep holes wet the stone with steady but imperceptible [sic] flow of water.<sup>51</sup>

Circular basins were designed to hold seasonal displays of water lilies, flowers, and plants. Such features, it was hoped, would “lend color and contrast to the basic design.”<sup>52</sup> Water that spills out of the garden runs into a circular drainage trough, ringed by terrazzo panels similar to those originally used in the plaza. In addition, one of the curved glass panels that separate the garden from the bank pivots to allow gardeners and maintenance workers to enter the well.

Shortly after completion, several goldfish were introduced by “some passer-by.” It became a novelty and a popular addition to Noguchi’s garden and the bank staff decided to add more. The *New York Times* reported in July 1964:

But what people liked best . . . were the 100 large goldfish that flirted with the fountain’s currents. At noontime, fish-watchers often stood two or three deep.<sup>53</sup>

These fish, however, quickly died – apparently victims of the brass piping and copper found in the numerous pennies pitched into the pool. While the fountains continue to function during warm months, in recent decades the amount of water filling the garden, as well as the botanical displays, has been limited.

### Reception

From the first public announcement that Chase Manhattan Bank would remain in the financial district to the completion of the south plaza in 1964, the building’s construction attracted considerable attention from local newspapers, professional journals, and general interest magazines. The bank published a “souvenir issue” of *The Chase Manhattan News* and a dozen “young ladies” were hired by the public relations department to lead clients and other visitors through the building.<sup>54</sup> One of the most



memorable views of the building that circulated was made by photographer Erich Locker. Widely used in advertisements and titled “The Chase Manhattan Tower at Dawn,” it depicted the new headquarters like a gleaming white knight rising to save the financial district.<sup>55</sup> Most articles focused on the project’s size and its intended impact on lower Manhattan. The *New York Times* reported enthusiastically on the bank’s plans as early as 1955, saying it “would bring a touch of beauty to an area where heavy columned buildings have long been symbolic of high finance.” The plaza was anticipated to be “an oasis in the canyons.” As construction progressed, stories addressed Rockefeller’s wise leadership, as well as the use of supporting columns as “bold vertical accents” on the exterior. When the building opened in May 1961, *Time* magazine claimed the “new building unmistakably bears the Rockefeller touch” and the *New York Times* called it “New York’s newest landmark . . . A new peak in the skyline.”<sup>56</sup> Shortly later, a nine-image photo essay was accompanied by captions that praised the bank for “bringing space, sunlight and beauty” to the city’s “stern, forbidding financial district” and when the plaza was formally opened, Mayor Robert Wagner was quoted as saying it was “an example of New York City’s endless renaissance.”<sup>57</sup>

Architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable addressed the building in two related *New York Times* articles in late 1960. Both were written with an eye to the wider architectural context, comparing the bank’s headquarters to the Time-Life Building (Harrison & Abramowitz & Harris, 1956-60), as well as the Union Carbide Building (SOM, 1956-60). Huxtable wrote that these towers shared “a still too-rare esthetic excellence” and that “These are the kind of monumental undertakings that would make a Pharaoh or Roman emperor blush, and turn the Medici green with envy.” Her second essay described how few Manhattan buildings are deserving of the word “beauty” and how Chase Manhattan Plaza was an “impressive building with superbly integrated plaza, it carries the double promise of corporate efficiency and a more enduring value: significant civic beauty.”<sup>58</sup> In 1962, critic Wolf von Eckardt wrote in the *New Republic* that while SOM’s design was “not sensationally original,” it was “another quiet triumph.”<sup>59</sup> Sociologist William Whyte, writing for *New York Magazine* in 1974, called the plaza one of the city’s “great processional spaces” and the *Daily News* listed the building as having one of Manhattan’s ten best lobbies.<sup>60</sup> Paul Goldberger, who succeeded Huxtable as architecture critic at the *New York Times*, was less enthusiastic. Writing in 1979, he appreciated the building’s impact on the surrounding neighborhood but criticized the plaza and its failed architectural “progeny.”<sup>61</sup>

### Subsequent History

At the time of completion, the building was 99% occupied. The bank filled the lower half of the building and the rest of the floors were leased to 61 outside tenants, with 2,500 employees. Most were involved in the financial industry, including E. F. Hutton, Fuji Bank, and Cravath Swaine & Moore. In addition, the Wall Street Club, a private luncheon club with historic links to Chase and its predecessors, operated a dozen dining rooms on the 59<sup>th</sup> floor.<sup>62</sup>

During the building’s first decade, the owners faced several challenges, including a fire in the sub-basement in 1962, “popping windows” in 1964, and a bombing in the bank’s international department on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor protesting the Vietnam War in November 1969. The 40-foot-tall *Group of Four Trees* (not part of designation), by the French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), was installed in the south plaza near the east stairs in 1971 and dedicated in October 1972.<sup>63</sup> Chase began renovating the complex in 1991, following a late 1980s asbestos abatement. Not only were major tenants planning to relocate, but the bank was moving some of its back office operations to MetroTech Center in Brooklyn. Michael McCarthy (d. 2002) at SOM supervised the \$30 million job, which began with the cleaning of the aluminum exterior. The terrazzo in the plaza was then replaced with granite pavers and the solid marble perimeter wall with glass. A fourth entrance was also added, a wide staircase in the west plaza, near the corner of Nassau and Liberty Streets. Work was completed by January 1994.<sup>64</sup> Two years later, following a merger with Chemical Bank, the bank’s executive offices were moved to 270 Park Avenue, between 47<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Streets. In 2008, the south plaza was named to honor David Rockefeller and a small plaque was installed in the pavement, near the Dubuffet sculpture. The bank is currently known as J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. and the building continues to be used by both bank employees and outside tenants.

## Description

**One Chase Manhattan Plaza** occupies an irregularly-shaped site in lower Manhattan, bordered by Liberty Street, William Street, Pine Street (in part), and Nassau Street (in part). To the southwest is 20 Pine Street, a 1920s office building that has been converted to apartments. It is not part of the designation. The main elements in the complex include the aluminum and glass tower, as well as an extensive plaza with a circular sunken garden by Isamu Noguchi. Both the plaza's gray granite paving and outer glass walls with stainless steel fittings are non-historic and date from the mid-1990s.

Oriented from east to west, the **60-story tower** rises on the northern part of the site, between the former path of Cedar Street and Liberty Street. The base of the tower is glazed and recessed from the above floors. The light-colored surface visible beneath the tower's second floor has seams that align with the silver and black mullions that frame the large glass panels that enclose the lobby. The east and west elevations have four evenly-spaced aluminum-clad columns with a matte finish, two that are recessed at the plaza level and two that extend outside it, as part of the perimeter colonnade that extends from and continues along the north and south elevations. These projecting piers meet the facade and rise without interruption to the roof. Each bay contains six windows, flanked by H-shaped aluminum mullions. At most floors, the mullions extend over a black enameled aluminum panel, a vertical window, and an aluminum panel, but at the lowest level there is an additional aluminum panel that reads as a base. The four elevations are divided into four sections by horizontal ventilation louvers at the 11<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> floors. The uppermost section contains mechanical equipment and is disguised by metal roof enclosure, suggesting a crown.

The lobby's west elevation faces Nassau Street and contains two glazed revolving doors, flanked by security cameras set below the tower. The north doors are probably non-historic. The south elevation faces Pine Street and has two glazed revolving doors, near the east and west ends. The west doors are probably non-historic. Above these doors signs indicate: "ONE CHASE MANHATTAN PLAZA." Between the two entrances, glass panels have been altered to create a third entrance, flanked by metal railings that extend onto the south plaza.

The **west plaza** faces Nassau Street. The north corner stairs are not original. Added in the 1990s, both the risers and walls that flank the stairs are gray granite. To the south, adjoining the building at 20 Pine Street and aligned with Cedar Street, are two sets of staircases, a narrow staircase enclosed with glass walls that descends to the concourse level, and a wider staircase, with white marble cantilevered steps, extending from the north edge of the west plaza to 20 Pine Street, that rises east onto the south plaza. These staircases have non-historic aluminum handrails. There are seven historic circular white marble benches that enclose planting beds in the west plaza, as well as a red cedar totem pole by Ken Mowatt (1980, not part of the designation). The **north plaza** (currently closed to the public) is connected to the east and west plazas and visible from Liberty Street. This narrow triangular space incorporates two raised non-historic concrete planting beds, dating from the 1990s. The west planting bed features a continuous bench.

The **south plaza** incorporates the former route of Cedar Street, and extends south to Pine Street. Along Pine Street, near William Street, is a wide marble staircase with cantilevered risers that ascends in two sections. To the west (left) of the stairs is non-historic ramp with glass walls, as well as a tree set into a square pit. To the east (right) of the stairs are a pair of historic aluminum flagpoles. Between the flagpoles is a non-historic "Downtown Manhattan" information sign. The plaza's "Sunken Garden" is sited in a circular well between the south stairs and a raised cantilevered marble planting bed that is original and adjoins the east facade of 20 Pine Street. The 60-foot diameter garden is well preserved; it was designed to be viewed from the plaza and is ringed by the original glass panels, with stainless steel fittings. In the pavement of the plaza, close to the walls that enclose the circular well, are numerous round brass drains that empty via white spouts that are visible below the granite panels, beneath the plaza. Below, at the concourse level, the bank branch has curved glass walls framed with aluminum moldings that align with the seams that divide the white terrazzo pavement that encircles the fountain. The fountain itself incorporates black basalt rocks of various dimensions and undulating granite block pavers.

At the south plaza's east edge are twelve trees, aligned in two rows, from north to south, planted in circular pits. Between each row are four non-historic circular granite benches. North of the trees,

aligned with Cedar Street, is a staircase that descends east, to William Street. Though the placement is original, the materials are non-historic, particularly on the south side, where the wall rises to become a sign for the bank, trimmed the aluminum and glass panels. The Jean Dubuffet sculpture (not part of the designation) is aligned with the staircase to be visible from both Nassau and William Streets. On the east side of the tower is a small rectangular plaza, overlooking William and Liberty Streets. Paved in non-historic granite, the **east plaza** adjoins the east stairs and is enclosed with non-historic glass walls.

The **east entrance to the concourse level** is located close to where Cedar Street meets William Street. Set below the plaza level and aligned with the former path of Cedar Street, it contains two glazed revolving doors that flank a pair of glass doors. Above the doors, on a black background, are silver capital letters that spell: “ONE CHASE MANHATTAN PLAZA.” To either side of this recessed entrance are projecting polished black granite pillars that disguise ventilation equipment. Due to the slope of William Street, the groups of pillars on the north side are taller than those to the south, where a pair of black emergency exits adjoin the sidewalk.

**Liberty Street** rises to the west and here the base of the building is used mainly for service needs. At the east end, near William Street, is a row of projecting polished black granite pillars, as well as seven black doors that function as emergency exits. In addition, from east to west, there is: a wide aluminum roll-down garage door flanked by metal traffic signals, painted yellow; a pair of black doors with rectangular windows and an aluminum handle; a pair of black doors with aluminum trim and thin vertical windows; two original glazed revolving doors that flank a fixed glass panel. These doors are flanked by non-historic handicap access entrances to either side. At the east and west of ends of Liberty Street, attached to granite walls, are non-historic signs on raised rectangular aluminum panels.

Report researched and written by  
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Research Department

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> A great deal has been written about the design and construction of One Chase Manhattan Plaza. Major sources, on which aspects of this essay rely, include: Nicholas Adams, *Skidmore Owings & Merrill: SOM since 1936* (Milan: Electa Architecture/Phaidon Press Inc., 2007); Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore Owings & Merrill* (The Architectural History Foundation and the MIT Press, New York and London, 1988); David Rockefeller, *Memoirs* (New York: Random House, 2002), Robert A. M. Stern and others, *New York 1960* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997), 173-76; and John Donald Wilson, *The Chase: The Chase Manhattan Bank, NA, 1945-85* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “The Significance of Our New Skyscrapers,” *New York Times*, October 30, 1960, x13; “The Chase: portrait of a giant,” *Architectural Forum* (July 1961), 94. The latter quote appears in the section “Chase ... an appraisal,” written by either Peter Blake or Walter McQuade.

<sup>3</sup> “Merger Confirms New Banking Era,” *New York Times*, January 16, 1955, F1.

<sup>4</sup> “Billion-Dollar Planner: David Rockefeller,” *New York Times*, October 15, 1958, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 161.

<sup>6</sup> “Chase Buys Nassau St. Block,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1955. The site had been previously occupied by the Middle Dutch Church, where reportedly Benjamin Franklin conducted some early electric experiments. See “Only 2 Previous Buildings Occupied the Site of 1 Chase Manhattan Plaza” in *The Chase Manhattan News: Souvenir Issue*, May 1961, 7.

<sup>7</sup> During the next five years, Zeckendorf liquidated various downtown properties owned by Chase Manhattan Bank. He called the “Wall Street Maneuver” the “most important thing we ever did in the New York Community and we

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were happy to do it.” See *The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, with Edward McCreary (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 265, 273-74.

<sup>8</sup> “Chase to Raze Old Buildings,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1955, 43.

<sup>9</sup> Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 163.

<sup>10</sup> “The Chase: portrait of giant,” *Architectural Forum* (July 1961), 86.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques E. Gutton, *A Life in Three Lands* (Boston: Branden Publishing Company, 1991), 152.

<sup>12</sup> “Nathaniel Owings, 81, Dies; Early Skyscraper Advocate,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1983, B18.

<sup>13</sup> Rockefeller, *Memoirs*, 164.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Rockefeller, 166. The Commission voted on the street closing in June 1956. See *New York Times*, June 7, 1956, 33.

<sup>16</sup> “Chase Manhattan Bank Planning a Downtown “Rockefeller Center,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1955, 1.

<sup>17</sup> “New Building Project,” *The Chase Manhattan Magazine* (February 1956), 1, SOM Archives.

<sup>18</sup> “City Joins Bank to Assure a New Downtown Center,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1955, 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Architectural Forum*, (July 1961), 63. Chase Manhattan Bank announced plans to sell 18 Pine Street to Chemical Corn Exchange Bank in April 1956.

<sup>21</sup> *Architectural Forum*, (July 1961), 70.

<sup>22</sup> To build 85 Broad Street (SOM, 1983) for Goldman Sachs, the Board of Estimate agreed to de-map a curved section of Stone Street, between Broad Street and Coenties Alley. In addition, a section of Coenties Alley was relocated. In 1983, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the “Street Plan of New Amsterdam and Colonial New York,” protecting the area below Wall Street.

<sup>23</sup> Douglass Haskell, “The New Esplanade,” *Architectural Forum* (November 1956), viewed at SOM Archives.

<sup>24</sup> New York City Board of Standards and Appeals, calendar number 347-56-BZ.

<sup>25</sup> Glenn Fowler, “Novel Design Gives Skyscrapers Bold Vertical Accents,” *New York Times*, August 23, 1959, R1. Though the Time-Life Building displays a similar system, the outside columns are clad in limestone and do not project as far forward.

<sup>26</sup> Jane Jacobs, *Architectural Forum* (March 1957), 105-113.

<sup>27</sup> See Jurgen Joedicke, *Office Buildings* (New York: Praeger, 1962), 1976, 31ff.

<sup>28</sup> Donald Friedman, *Historical Building Construction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 124.

<sup>29</sup> *Architectural Forum*, (July 1961), 91.

<sup>30</sup> Friedman, 124. Though initially planned with a conventional masonry skin, the design of 99 Park Avenue was modified during construction, following completion of the ALCOA Building in Pittsburgh and a series of successful tests by the material’s manufacturer, the General Bronze Corporation in Garden City, Long Island – the same company that supplied the panels for Chase Manhattan Plaza. See “Tishman Building To Be Of Aluminum,” *New York Times*, December 18, 1952, 53.

<sup>31</sup> *Architectural Forum*, (July 1961), 91. According to Bunshaft biographer, Carol Krinsky, to please a senior building committee member, granite had also been proposed but was rejected. Krinsky, 73.

<sup>32</sup> *Architectural Forum* (July 1961), 90.

<sup>33</sup> Rockefeller, 164.

<sup>34</sup> “Tower with a front yard,” *Architectural Forum* (April 1957).

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- <sup>35</sup> No. 1 Chase Manhattan Plaza,” *Real Estate Forum* (June 1960), 58. In addition, Canadian black granite was used along William and Liberty Streets. In other locations, the trim is light silver white granite.
- <sup>36</sup> J. Walter Severinghaus, “Work places for Art” in *Art At Work: The Chase Manhattan Collection* (New York: EP Dutton, 1984), 20.
- <sup>37</sup> An early plan for Rockefeller Center incorporated a sunken oval plaza. Rockefeller Center Designation Report, 167.
- <sup>38</sup> See Manhattan’s Outdoor Sculpture, 22; Severinghaus, *Art at Work*, 20. According to *Skyscraper Management* magazine (September 1956), 800 people a day came to view the model. Viewed at SOM Archives.
- <sup>39</sup> *Architectural Forum*, “Tower with a Front Yard,” 114.
- <sup>40</sup> “Chase Manhattan Bank Breaks Ground for 60-Story Headquarters,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1957, 39.
- <sup>41</sup> In June 1958, a crane fell, killing the operator. See *Herald Tribune*, June 7, 1958, SOM Archives.
- <sup>42</sup> At the time, only two buildings in New York City had more steel – the Empire State Buildings and the RCA Building at Rockefeller Center. See “Lofty Ceremony Is Held for New Bank Building,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1959, 37.
- <sup>43</sup> “Chase Bank Will Start Its Move To New Skyscraper on Jan. 13,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1960, 29.
- <sup>44</sup> “Chase Bank Opens 64-Story Tower,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1961, 24; “New York’s Old Financial Districts Gets New Skyscraper,” *Architectural Record* (July 1961), 142ff.
- <sup>45</sup> Prior to completion of the south plaza, the bank branch was temporarily located at the northwest corner of the concourse level, where the auditorium is today.
- <sup>46</sup> “Moving Days Set for New South Plaza,” *The Chase Manhattan News* (December 1963); “Chase Bank Plaza Opens With Party,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1964, 61.
- <sup>47</sup> Rockefeller, “Looking Back,” *Art at Work*, 11.
- <sup>48</sup> See Krinsky, photo, 164, and “Isamu Noguchi; Art Into Life,” at [www.noguchi.org](http://www.noguchi.org), 10/28/2008.
- <sup>49</sup> “Sunken Garden at Chase Manhattan Plaza,” last viewed at [www.noguchi.org](http://www.noguchi.org), 10/28/2008.
- <sup>50</sup> “Japanese Garden for Wall Street,” *Herald Tribune*, September 13, 1963. Viewed at SOM Archives.
- <sup>51</sup> “Fact Sheet on Chase Manhattan’s Sculptural Water Garden.” Viewed at SOM Archives.
- <sup>52</sup> “Japanese Garden.”
- <sup>53</sup> “Pennies and Plumbing Finish Off the Chase-Manhattan Goldfish,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1964, 31.
- <sup>54</sup> An eight page “souvenir issue” of *The Chase Manhattan News* was published in May 1961. Viewed at SOM Archives.
- <sup>55</sup> Locker’s image and others by Ezra Stoller can be viewed at [http://www.som.com/content.cfm/one\\_chase\\_manhattan\\_plaza](http://www.som.com/content.cfm/one_chase_manhattan_plaza).
- <sup>56</sup> “The Rockefeller Touch,” *Time* (May 26, 1961), last viewed at Time.com, 2/8/2007; “Chase Bank Opens 64-Story Tower,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1961, 24.
- <sup>57</sup> “Chase Bank Plaza Opens With Party,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1964, 61.
- <sup>58</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “The Significance of Our New Skyscrapers” and “Some New Skyscrapers And How They Grew,” *New York Times*, October 30, 1960, X13, and November 6, 1960, X12.
- <sup>59</sup> Wolf Von Eckardt, “Pan Am’s Glass House,” *New Republic* (August 13, 1962), 25.
- <sup>60</sup> William Whyte, “Best Street Life in the World,” *New York* (July 15, 1974), SOM Archives.
- <sup>61</sup> Paul Goldberger, *The City Observed: New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 23.
- <sup>62</sup> *Chase Manhattan News* (July 1962), SOM Archives.

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<sup>63</sup> This aluminum and fiberglass sculpture was financed by David Rockefeller and is owned by the Museum of Modern Art.

<sup>64</sup> As part of the renovation, the mezzanine level was removed from the base of the tower. Adams, 142; “Chase Manhattan completes renovations.” *Crain’s*, January 24, 1994, 14.

## 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 One Chase Manhattan Plaza 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 One Chase Manhattan Plaza, built 1957-64, is located in lower Manhattan; that it is located on a “superblock” site bordered by Nassau, Liberty, Pine, and William Streets; that the 2½ acre site was created when the City of New York agree to let the bank close a single block of Cedar Street; that this 813-foot-tall structure is among the largest and most important 20<sup>th</sup> century skyscrapers in New York City; that it was primarily planned by Chase Manhattan Bank executive vice president David Rockefeller, the youngest son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, and designed by the prestigious architectural firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill; that the partner in charge of the project was J. Walter Severinghaus, with Gordon Bunshaft as partner in charge of the design and Jacques E. Guiton as lead designer; that it was planned following the 1955 merger of Chase National Bank and the Bank of the Manhattan Company to consolidate 8,700 employees; that the architects designed the elegant slab-like tower in the International Style, cladding the gridded façade with natural color and black porcelain-enameled aluminum panels, as well as H-section mullions and clear glass; that the complex was constructed in two overlapping stages, starting first with the 60-story tower covering slightly more than 27% of the site in 1957-61, followed by the south plaza in 1961-64; that this spacious plaza levels the site and incorporates six levels as well as a circular well where a “Sunken Garden” by the Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi is located; that this serene work of art features fountains and basalt rocks and is visible from the plaza; that this unique element helps illuminate the bank branch that surrounds it on all sides; that One Chase Manhattan Plaza generated considerable media attention, was widely praised by architecture critics and helped spark a downtown renaissance, leading to construction of the World Trade and Financial Centers.

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 One Chase Manhattan Plaza, Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 44, Lot 1, as its Landmark Site.

Commissioners:

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo Vengoechea, Vice-Chair

Fred Bland, Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz,

Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Roberta Washington, Commissioners



**One Chase Manhattan Plaza**, south elevation  
(aka 16-48 Liberty Street, 26-40 Nassau Street, 28-44 Pine Street, 55-77 William Street)  
Tax Map Block 44, Lot 1  
*Photo: Carl Forster*





**One Chase Manhattan Plaza**  
View from corner of Nassau Street and Liberty Street  
*Photo: Chris Brazee*



**One Chase Manhattan Plaza**  
Northwest & East Entrance Stairs  
*Photos: Carl Forster*



**One Chase Manhattan Plaza**  
South plaza, view towards northwest  
South entrance stairs, Pine Street  
Photos: Chris Brazee, Carl Forster



**One Chase Manhattan Plaza**

Sunken Garden in South plaza, view toward Pine Street  
East plaza, view south toward East Stairs and Pine Street

*Photos: Carl Forster*



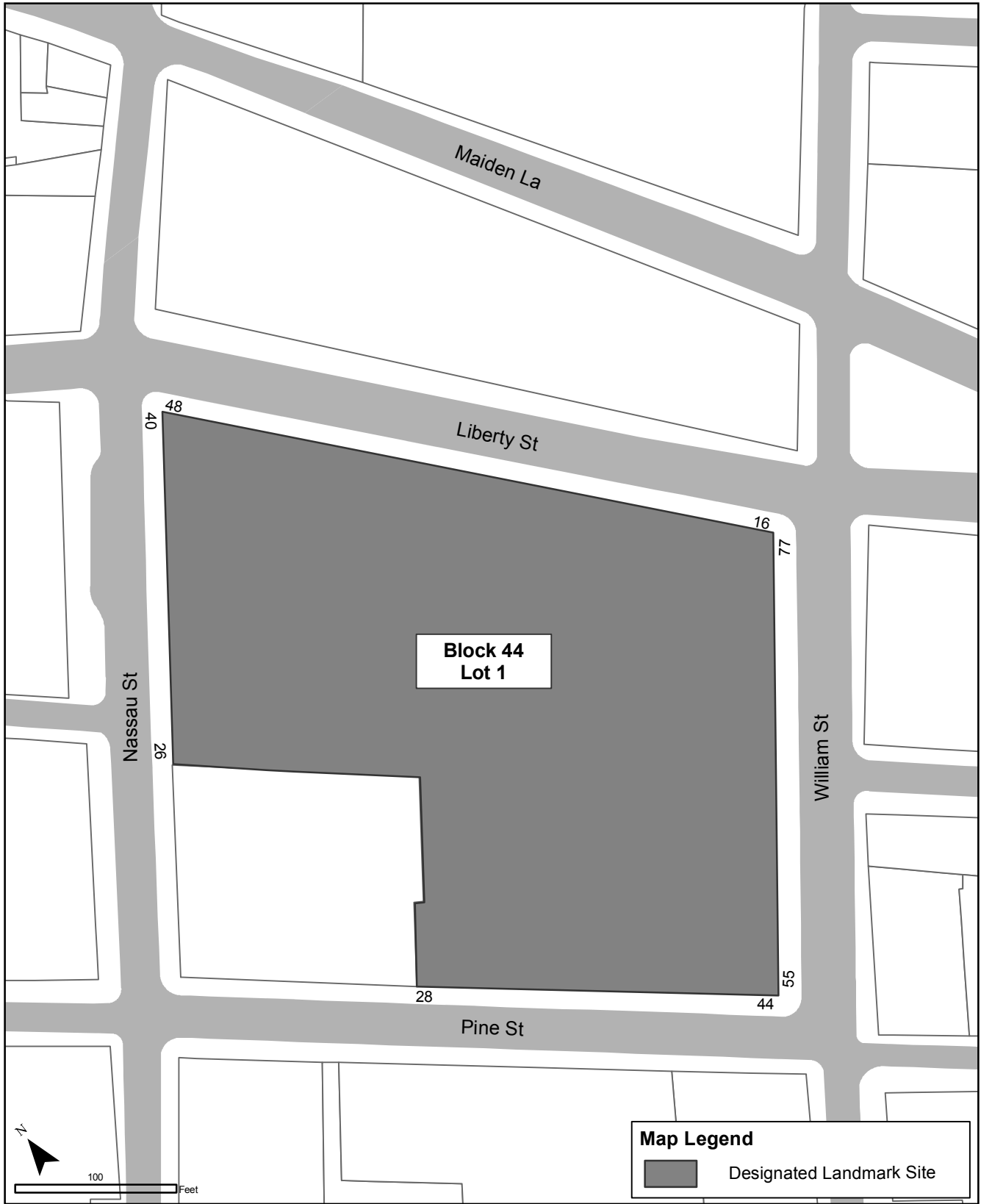
**One Chase Manhattan Plaza**

Colonnade adjoining South plaza, view east, toward William Street  
Concourse Level and base of tower, facing William Street

*Photos: Carl Forster*



**One Chase Manhattan Plaza**  
Concourse Level, view north along William Street  
Concourse Level, corner of William and Liberty Streets  
*Photos: Carl Forster*



ONE CHASE MANHATTAN PLAZA (LP-2294), 1 Chase Manhattan Plaza (aka 16-48 Liberty Street, 26-40 Nassau Street, 28-44 Pine Street, 55-77 William Street). Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 44, Lot 1.

Designated: February 10, 2009