

Landmarks Preservation Commission
October 18, 1988, Designation List 210
LP-1556

KNICKERBOCKER HOTEL, 1462-1470 Broadway, Borough of Manhattan, Annex 143 West 41st Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1902; architects Marvin & Davis with Bruce Price as consulting architect. Completed in 1906; architects Trowbridge & Livingston.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 994 Lot 54.

On November 12, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Knickerbocker Hotel (Item No. 11). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Knickerbocker Hotel is one of the very few grand hotels in the Beaux-Arts style surviving in the Times Square area. Designed in 1901 by the firm of Marvin & Davis with the well-known Bruce Price as consulting architect, the building was financed by John Jacob Astor, the fourth namesake of the patriarch of one of America's richest families. It is executed in red brick, richly ornamented with French Renaissance detail, and crowned by a prominent copper mansard roof with corner pavilions and cresting.

The Knickerbocker was one of several New York hotels built by the Astor family in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Near Times Square in the heart of the theater district, it was advertised as a "Fifth Avenue Hotel at Broadway Prices"; intended to attract not only guests in residence, but also theater-goers and other visitors, its large restaurants and bar-rooms were elaborately decorated, featuring electrified fountains, and murals by noted artists such as Maxfield Parrish and Frederic Remington. These public rooms were designed in 1905 by the firm of Trowbridge & Livingston.

The hotel site also includes an annex with a narrow Romanesque Revival facade on West 41st Street which pre-dates the main building. This structure, which was used as a service entrance, was originally a small hotel, designed by Philip C. Brown in 1894.

With the onset of Prohibition, the Knickerbocker was converted to commercial and office use and continues to serve

these purposes, while also reflecting the architectural richness of the Times Square area in the Gilded Age.

The Development of Times Square

The construction of large hotels in the Times Square district resulted from the northward expansion of the city, the growth of mass transportation, and the relocation of the theater district.¹ A rural area in the early 1800s, it evolved into an urban area following the opening of Grand Central Depot and the completion of the Third and Sixth Avenue Elevated Railways in 1871. Although the first subway line--the IRT to 145th Street--did not reach Times Square until 1904, the route had already been fixed in 1901.² In that year plans were filed for three hotels, including the Knickerbocker, fourteen apartment houses, and one theater all located near Times Square. Land values rose about a third virtually overnight.³ The theater district, which had moved northward in stages, up Broadway, reached the area. Far-sighted theater managers, such as Oscar Hammerstein, who opened the Lyric Theater in 1895, anticipated the emergence of a new concentration of theaters around Times Square (which had been named for the Times Tower of 1904). Between 1901 and 1920, forty-three additional theaters were built in midtown, east and west of Broadway. Auxiliary entertainment services sprang up--restaurants, dance halls and hotels.

The Astor Family's Hotel Interests

The Knickerbocker was only one of several New York hotels constructed by the Astor family in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beginning with the Astor House of 1836 on lower Broadway, the family established a reputation for building costly and well-appointed hotels. John Jacob Astor (1864-1912), the fourth namesake of the patriarch of the family, and his cousin William Waldorf Astor (1848-1919) built a number of luxury hotels around the turn of the century. William Waldorf's Waldorf Hotel of 1895 and John Jacob's Astoria Hotel, begun in the same year on adjacent sites (both sites now occupied by the Empire State Building, a designated New York City Landmark) were eventually joined to form the first Waldor-Astoria Hotel (architect, Henry Hardenbergh) which was considered in its day to be the grandest New York hotel, setting the standard for others to equal or surpass.

William Waldorf Astor also financed the Hotel Netherland (1890-93; demolished) and the Hotel Astor at Times Square (1902-04; demolished). Designed by Clinton & Russell, the Hotel Astor was an elaborate Beaux-Arts structure, of red brick with limestone detail and a mansard roof. Comparable in style to the Knickerbocker, it also featured eclectic and elaborate public rooms. John Jacob Astor built the exclusive St. Regis Hotel on Fifth Avenue, begun in 1904, designed by Trowbridge & Livingston,

and this highly successful venture very likely led to that firm's commission for the interior of the Knickerbocker Hotel.

History of the Knickerbocker

John Jacob Astor leased the new hotel site to the Philadelphia-based International Realty & Construction Company. At the time of this agreement the site was occupied by the Hotel St. Cloud and a smaller eight-story building facing on West 41st Street (which became known as the annex). While the St. Cloud was razed (Astor stipulated that a new hotel to cost at least two million dollars replace it), the 41st Street structure was retained. According to the New York City Department of Buildings, it was designed by Philip C. Brown in 1894 as a hotel, and became the service entrance to the Knickerbocker.⁴

The Knickerbocker Holding Company was established with hotelier James B. Regan (1865-1932) as director and lessee. Regan, who had begun his career in the hotel business as a teenager, working his way up the ladder, had served as manager of several hotels, among them Manhattan's Pabst Hotel. Before embarking on this new endeavor, Regan spent several months in Europe visiting hotels to serve as models.⁵

Construction began in 1902, but in early 1904 work was halted with only a steel and masonry shell completed.⁶ Dissension within the Knickerbocker Holding Company prompted Regan's resignation and Astor instituted dispossession proceedings. Construction was only resumed in June of 1905, after Regan agreed to rent the hotel for twenty years at \$300,000 per annum, and after plans for the interior spaces were redesigned, Trowbridge & Livingston having been commissioned to complete the work. During 1905 a two-story portico was added to the 42nd Street facade, and the finishing touches were added to the exterior.

When the hotel opened its doors on October 24, 1906, it created a sensation. The interiors were lavishly decorated, including the cafe mural by painter and illustrator Maxfield Parrish (1870-1966), a tableau entitled "Old King Cole and His Fiddlers Three" and the dramatic "The United States Cavalry Charge" by Frederic Remington (1861-1909), a specialist in depicting America's Far West.⁷ Sculptor Frederick MacMonnies (1863-1937) had been commissioned to design two electrified fountains and artist Charles Finn to paint the mural, "Masque of Flowers" for the Flower Room. The Knickerbocker, with 556 rooms, could accommodate about one thousand guests in residence; the public rooms could serve two thousand. Clearly the Knickerbocker was intended as a place for entertainment, part of the nighttime excitement of the Times Square area. And although the Knickerbocker could not lay claim to "exclusiveness," it could offer luxury and amusement--"a Fifth Avenue Hotel at Broadway

Prices."⁸

The heyday of the Knickerbocker ended with the onset of Prohibition, despite James B. Regan's denials.⁹ The hotel which had played host to such diverse guests as Enrico Caruso and Woodrow Wilson was converted to commercial and office use.

The Architects

Except for his design of the Knickerbocker annex, nothing is known of the career of architect Philip C. Brown. Little is known about Frederick Marvin (and even less about Davis) except that he was a close associate of Price's.¹⁰ Marvin graduated from Cooper Union in the 1880s and joined Price's firm in 1895. Marvin worked in the Canadian office of the firm, working on the plans for the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec City and designing the Canadian Pacific's East End Station in Montreal. Marvin opened his own office in New York, which may have occurred shortly before the Knickerbocker commission. This would explain Bruce Price's appointment as consulting architect.

Bruce Price, a prominent architect, (1845-1903) was a native of Maryland who practiced architecture in Baltimore until 1876, having first attended the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) and studied architecture with the Baltimore firm of Neirnsee & Neilson.¹¹

After moving to New York in 1877, Price began work on the design and layout of Tuxedo Park, New York (1885-90), a suburban community with many buildings executed in the Shingle Style. Around 1890 Price became more interested in the urban setting and the development of the tall commercial building. He designed such buildings as the St. James Building (1896), the American Surety Company Building (1894-96), and the Bank of the Metropolis (1902-03) at 31 Union Square West, an impressive neo-Renaissance design and a designated New York City Landmark.

The firm of Trowbridge & Livingston was hired in 1905 to change the interior arrangement of rooms and re-design the decorative scheme. Samuel Beck Parkman Trowbridge (1862-1925), born in New York City, did his undergraduate studies at Trinity College, Hartford, and attended the American School of Classical Studies in Athens and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He entered the office of George B. Post upon his return to New York. In 1894, Trowbridge, Goodhue Livingston, and Stockton B. Colt formed a partnership that lasted until 1897, when Colt left and the firm became Trowbridge & Livingston.

Goodhue Livingston, a descendant of a prominent colonial New York family, received his degrees from Columbia during the same period Trowbridge was in school. Their partnership was long and productive. Their residential commissions included the Beaux-

Arts style 123 East 63rd and 123 East 70th Streets, the latter of which was Trowbridge's home. Their better-known public and commercial buildings include the luxurious St. Regis Hotel (1904), the New York Stock Exchange extension (1923), and the Oregon State Capitol (1936-38) in association with Francis Keally.

Description

Above the second story, the exterior of the Knickerbocker looks much as it did in 1906. The fourteen-story building is faced with red brick and is ornamented with terra cotta and Indiana limestone. It is in the Beaux-Arts style with many exuberant French Renaissance details. Except for the corner quoins, the first two stories of the building have suffered a series of inharmonious changes when altered for commercial and office use in the 1920s.

Both the Broadway and the West 42nd Street facades have corner pavilions that are brought slightly forward, and both facades are adorned by a series of balconies, cornices, and classical pediments that balance the vertical thrust of the building with their horizontal continuity. The former main facade on Broadway contains a seven-bay center pavilion flanked by four-bay pavilions on each side. Terra-cotta quoins mark the corners and paired window aedicules of the corner wings. These highly ornamented windows feature a feast of French Renaissance ornament: cornucopias, wreaths and putti surmounted by sculpted, segmental-arched or swan's neck pediments. The other windows in this facade are ornamented with iron balconies or smaller stone balconies on the fourth, sixth, seventh and eleventh stories. This, combined with five extant cornices using various degrees of ornament gives the building a sense of rhythm that combines with the color of the facade to create an ornate yet dignified design.

The structure is crowned by a three-story, steeply pitched green copper mansard roof punctuated with segmental-arched dormer windows and topped with its original corner urns and cresting. Four brick and stone chimneys mark the corners of the pavilions, rising above the roofline on the 42nd Street facade.

The Broadway facade is very similar to that of 42nd Street, except that it is nine bays wide and the visual focus is a large, segmental-arched pediment set above the central bay of the fourth story.

In 1908-10 architect C.H. Cullen added a penthouse which was to be used for upholstery repair. In 1911 the portico on the sidewalk level of 42nd Street was removed, probably to accommodate the widening of the street.

Many of the changes in the Knickerbocker occurred in 1920-21 when the building was changed to office and retail use. The change from hotel to offices was accomplished under architect Charles A. Platt (1861-1933), best known for his residential designs. Changes in the exterior included the loss of the balustrade on the cornice above the ninth floor, the loss of the iron railing on the upper cornice, the replacement of the dormer window enframements with simple segmental-arched lintels, the installation of a third story of dormers, and the removal of the tile covering the top of the mansard. In recent years anodized aluminum one-over-one sash windows have been installed above the second story.

The interiors were altered far more radically. The public spaces were removed and their fittings sold. The upper floors were changed to offices, and while a few radiators and floors are extant, little else remains.¹²

Standing at 143 West 41st Street, the annex to the Knickerbocker Hotel has a narrow eight-story Romanesque Revival facade with Beaux-Arts ornament faced in buff-colored brick and terra cotta. The altered ground story and the three-bay second story are crowned by a classical cornice that serves as a sill for a wide brick arch with terra-cotta trim that encloses a relieving arch framing the fourth and fifth stories. Two corner brackets at the sixth story serve as bases for raised pilasters that frame the sixth, seventh, and eighth stories. Instead of conventional capitals, the pilasters have heavy modillions that support a bracketed cornice. The sixth story is two bays wide, while the seventh story is the same width composed of three narrower windows. The eighth story is also three bays wide, with paired half-columns separating the bays. A brick arch crowns each window, one arch flowing into the next. The attic story is a 1906 addition consisting of two dormer windows framed by short columns and crowned by triangular pediments faced in green copper. Griffins on pedestals stand guard beside the windows on each corner. All the windows above the second story are the original wood one-over-one sash.

Subsequent History

After the conversion to retail and office space, the Knickerbocker Hotel was first known as the Knickerbocker Building. From 1940 to 1959 it was called the Newsweek Building, after the major tenant, Newsweek magazine. Alterations to the first and second stories, have occurred regularly since 1920, most significantly window alterations and signage changes.

In 1979 the main entrance was changed to 1466 Broadway. The building continues to be used for offices and for commercial purposes.

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NOTES

1. This discussion of the development of Times Square is based on LPC, Martin Beck Theater Designation Report, report edited by Anthony Robbins (New York, 1987).
2. I.N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island, vol. 3 (New York, 1915-28), 819.
3. Ibid.
4. NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 994, Lot 54. NB 243, 1894.
5. The new building application, filed in 1901, listed Marvin & Davis as architects with Bruce Price (1843-1903) as consulting architect. The estimated cost was \$2,500,000. The masons were listed as J.E. and A.L. Pennock of Philadelphia. The application stipulated that the annex remain a part of the hotel, and that the Knickerbocker's roof was to be a mansard of two pitches, with copper cladding on the slope and tile on the flat portion of the roof. See NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 994, Lot 54. NB 1564, 1901.
6. National Register of Historic Places, Knickerbocker Hotel, U.S. Department of the Interior, Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Services (Form prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart), 1.
7. "Old King Cole and His Fiddlers Three" is now located in the St. Regis Hotel, while "The United States Cavalry Charge" is now in the collection of the University of Texas at Austin. See Dolkart, 3.
8. "Knickerbocker Hotel Opens to Guests Today," New York Times, October 24, 1906, p.9.
9. Quoted in "James B. Regan dies of Pneumonia," New York Times, February 15, 1932, p.17.
10. Based on Dolkart, 2.
11. The information on Bruce Price is based on the discussion in LPC, The Bank of the Metropolis Designation Report, report prepared by Lisa Koenigsburg (New York, 1988), 2.
12. Dolkart, 2.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Knickerbocker Hotel is one of the very few grand hotels in the Beaux-Arts style surviving in the Times Square area; that it is executed in red brick with exuberantly rich French Renaissance detail and is crowned by a prominent copper mansard roof with corner pavilions and cresting; that it was designed in 1901 by Marvin & Davis with the well-known Bruce Price as consulting architect; that the building was financed by John Jacob Astor, the fourth namesake of the patriarch of one of America's richest families; that it was one of several luxury hotels built by the Astor family in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; that it was located in Times Square in the heart of the new theater district and was advertised as a "Fifth Avenue Hotel at Broadway Prices"; that it was intended to attract not only guests in residence but also theater-goers and other visitors to its large and elaborately decorated public rooms, designed by Trowbridge & Livingston; and that it continues to reflect the architectural richness of the Times Square area at the turn of the century.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 31, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Knickerbocker Hotel, 1462-1470 Broadway, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 994, Lot 54, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Knickerbocker Hotel
1462-1470 Broadway

Architects: Marvin & Davis,
Bruce Price, Trowbridge & Livingstone
Photo Credit: Kevin McHugh



Knickerbocker Hotel

Photo : Architectural Record,
January, 1907



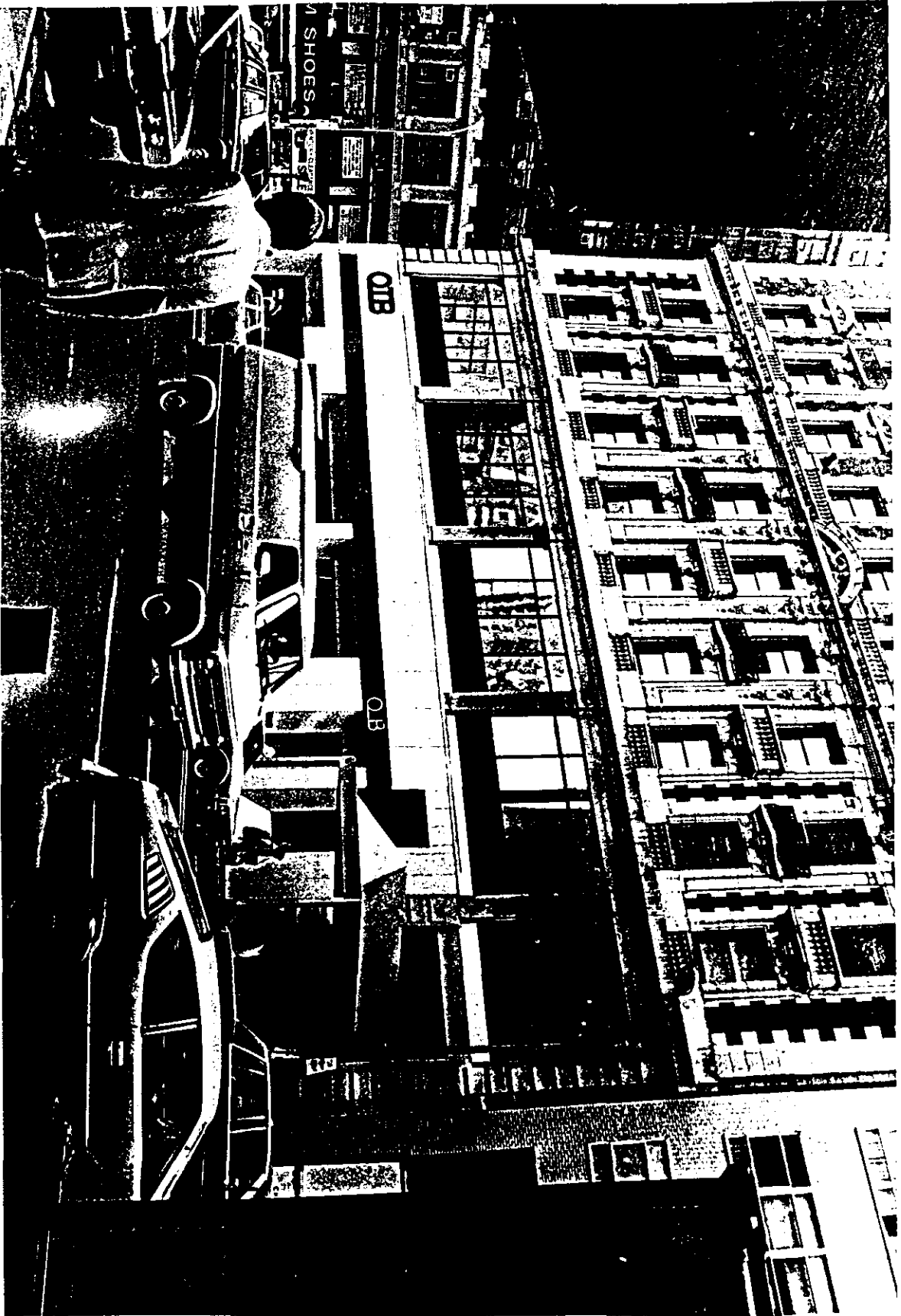
Knickerbocker Hotel
Facade, West 42nd Street

Photo credit: Kevin McHugh



Knickerbocker Hotel
Facade, Broadway

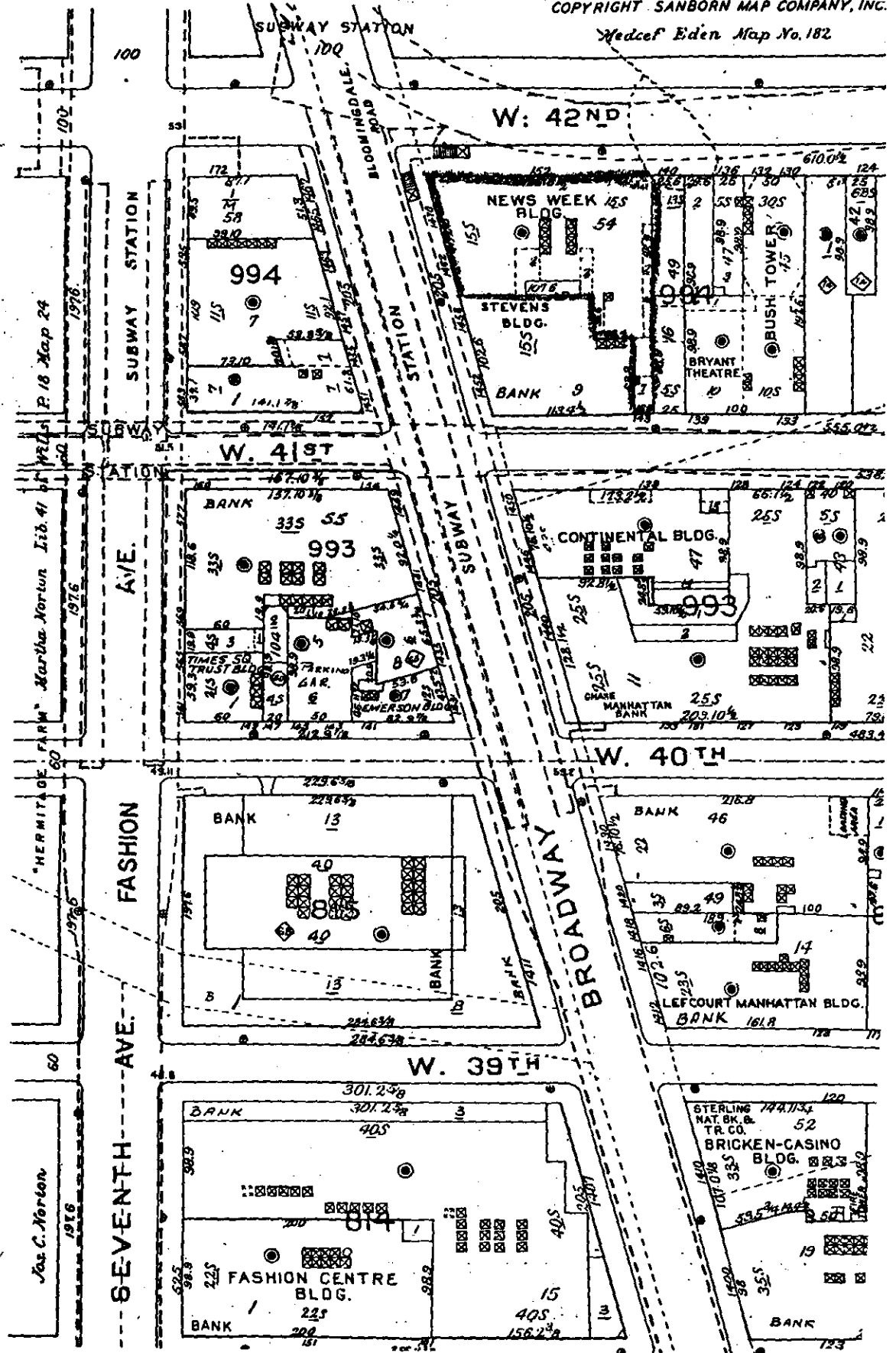
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Knickerbocker Hotel
Broadway Facade, entrance

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The Knickerbocker Hotel, Landmark Site
Graphic Source: Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1987-88