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Landmarks Preservation Commission
June 25, 1996, Designation List 273
LP-1906

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BROOKLYN TRUST COMPANY (now Chemical Bank) BUILDING, first floor interior, consisting of the Montague Street and Pierrepont Street entrance vestibules and elevator alcoves; the banking hall; and the stairwell and staircase leading to the basement vault area; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces; floor surfaces; windows; doors; chandeliers and lighting fixtures; railings; tellers' counters; decorative metalwork; and attached furnishings and decorative elements; 177-179 Montague Street and 134-138 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn. Built 1913-16; architects York & Sawyer.

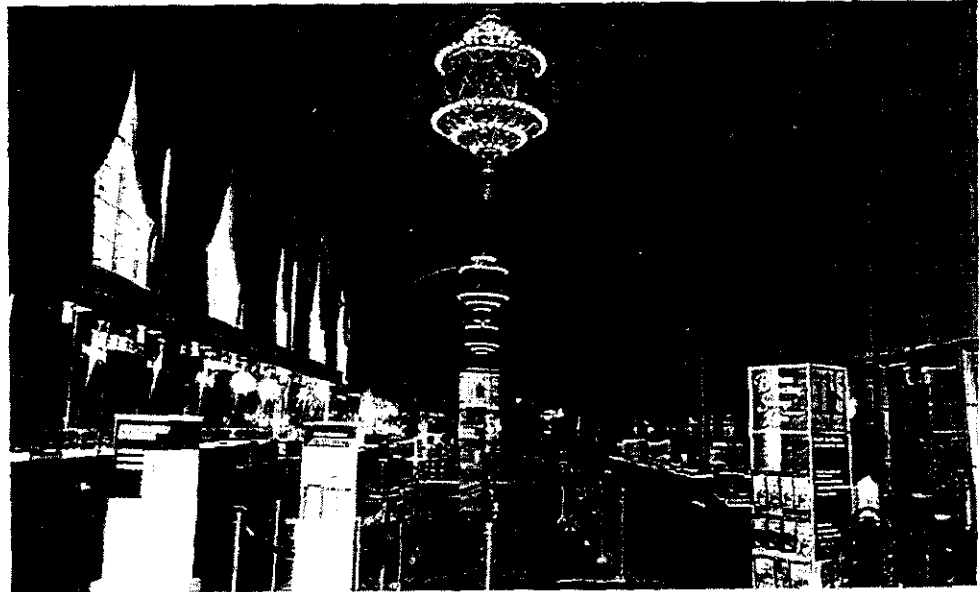
JULY 5 1996
LAND USE REVIEW
DEPT. OF CITY PLANNING

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 244, Lot 17.

On June 15, 1993, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Brooklyn Trust Company (now Chemical Bank) Building, first floor interior, with the spaces and features listed above, and the proposed designation of the related landmark site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A representative of the owner expressed uncertainty about the proposed designation, and requested that the hearing be continued to a later date. The hearing was continued on September 21, 1993 (Item No. 2). A total of two witnesses, including a representative of the Brooklyn Heights Association, spoke in favor of designation at the two public hearings. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

Summary

The Brooklyn Trust Company building (now a branch of Chemical Bank), designed by the prominent firm of York & Sawyer, a talented, prolific, and versatile team, was constructed in 1913-16 in a style modeled closely after the *palazzi* of the sixteenth-century Italian High Renaissance. The design of the interior banking hall, a single-



vaulted space, also recalls ancient baths and basilicas as well as Italian Renaissance churches. This interior, gracefully adapted to the imagery and functions of American banking in the early twentieth century, continues to project an image of tradition, stability, and security. Although relatively small, the interior is monumentally scaled and beautifully proportioned, executed by superb craftsmen, in fine materials.

The Brooklyn Trust Company played an important historic role in Brooklyn, from its founding during the aftermath of the Civil War until its consolidation with larger banks beginning in the mid-twentieth century. Its founders, subsequent trustees, and administrators were notable Brooklynites, committed not only to fiduciary but also to community responsibility. Today, the largely-intact interior is a reminder of the importance of the institution in the Brooklyn community. Alterations in response to changing banking procedures and services have been carried out with respect for the original fabric and design.

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Huberty & Hudswell, extent), 188-190 Montague. Interspersed with these new tall office buildings were a series of low, predominantly two- or three-story neo-classical bank and insurance company buildings, constructed in the early 1900s.

It was against this backdrop that the officers of the Brooklyn Trust Company decided in 1913 to demolish their old headquarters and erect a new and larger, up-to-date building. They acquired the property of the Brooklyn Club, behind and to the north, thus consolidating a site along the entire Clinton Street blockfront, between Montague and Pierpont Streets. Construction of the new building was carried on in two separate campaigns, beginning at the north. While the headquarters in the old Taylor mansion remained open for business, the Brooklyn Club building was razed, and the new section of the building completed in the late summer of 1915. The bank then switched its operations to the new portion of the building, while the second, Montague Street section was built on the site of the old headquarters. The entire new structure was officially opened in September of 1916.¹⁰ The design, with two imposing entrances, north and south, seems to reflect its position in the Brooklyn banking community of the time -- one door leading to the residential community of private clients in Brooklyn Heights, the other directed to the financial and public center of Downtown Brooklyn.

Bank Buildings and Architectural Imagery¹¹

In the years following the Civil War, when New York's banks were proliferating at a rapid rate, the majority of banking institutions catering to private clients -- such as savings and trust companies -- were housed in converted residences or office buildings, rather than in buildings designed specifically for their needs. Corner sites were considered convenient, relatively conspicuous, and thus desirable. The converted Taylor mansion fit this pattern. The building was substantial, reassuring, convenient yet discreet; its architectural style did not proclaim its function.¹²

Some twenty years later, a new trend in bank design for savings and trust companies began to emerge. Volatile economic conditions led bank officers to feel a need to reassure private investors of their bank's stability and security. One way of reinforcing confidence was through a strong public image; this could be accomplished through architecture -- a physical, tangible statement of fiduciary strength -- the bank building as a "modern

strongbox." Appropriate, historic architectural styles served to enhance the image. This attitude toward the architecture of banking was in step with two major architectural currents of the time -- the City Beautiful movement and Academic Classicism -- both of which had arisen in the wake of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. One of the first truly grand neo-classical banks spawned by these movements was the Bowery Savings Bank (1894, McKim, Mead & White). (Its construction was supervised by one of the architects of the Brooklyn Trust Company building, Edward York). The design, with a colossal Corinthian order and a pedimented temple front recalled ancient Roman precedents. Bank design of the period made intentional allusions to Roman temples and also to Greek treasury buildings. They may also have been designed with reference to older, long-established American banks, whose buildings of the early nineteenth century were designed in the Greek Revival style. This Greco-Roman neo-classical style for banks was to remain predominant for the following three decades. The architects of the Brooklyn Trust Company employed variants of the neo-classical style for the majority of their many banking commissions, beginning with the temple-fronted Franklin Savings Bank of 1899.

York & Sawyer, Architects¹³

York & Sawyer was one of the most prominent and prolific New York architectural firms during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Designing in the Academic Classic tradition, they specialized in educational institutions, hospitals, office buildings, and most importantly bank buildings, receiving approximately fifty such commissions during the architects' long association. With the death of Edward York in 1928, the "golden age" of the firm came to an end, although it continued to flourish and produce work of serious merit.

The York & Sawyer partnership was formed in 1898 by two men who had both enjoyed an education and apprenticeship that would have been envied by virtually any aspiring American architect of the later nineteenth century. Edward Palmer York (1865-1928) first studied architecture at Cornell University and in 1890 entered the offices of the prestigious firm, McKim, Mead & White, serving as assistant to the most flamboyant, and most talented partner, Stanford White. Philip Sawyer (1868-1949) first trained in civil engineering

Description of the Brooklyn Trust Company
Interior¹

Banking Hall (Fig. 1)

The banking hall of the Brooklyn Trust Company building is a monumentally scaled, although relatively small and narrow, vaulted rectangular room. Symmetrically disposed, clearly organized, and richly detailed, its spatial organization and stylistic vocabulary evoke a sense of security and serenity, pride and tradition. A design based on Academic Classic principles, the banking hall is clearly indebted to the architecture of the Italian High Renaissance.

The vaulted banking hall is seven bays in length (from south to north) with single entrances at the north and south ends. Monochrome walls revetted with burnished yellow-beige marble harmonize with the polychromy of the elaborately coffered ceiling and the intricate marble mosaic floor. Fine materials and craftsmanship abound.

West and east elevations. Seven large double-height arched windows (mullioned, and containing 61 panes per window) are centered in each bay of the Clinton Street (west) elevation. On the opposite (east) elevation, these windows are mirrored by six blind arches and a round-arched window at the center bay. On both elevations, the blind arches and windows are flanked by smooth-rusticated pilasters on shallow piers, capped by a cornice of classical acanthus and running-dog motifs. A continuous frieze (interrupted by the piers and doorways) encircles the banking hall just beneath the windows. This cast frieze repeats a series of classical heads in profile, along with a bull, within circular medallions. They include the Roman goddess Minerva, the two-faced god Janus, and Alexander the Great -- these subjects being the most easily identified; all seem to be adapted from ancient coins -- fitting symbolism for a bank building. These medallions alternate with classical urns and acanthus rinceaux, flanked by serpent-tailed mythological monsters.

At the center bay of the Clinton Street elevation, a U-shaped marble stairwell (Fig. 2) leads downstairs to the safety deposit vaults of the bank.

¹Significant features in this interior space are underscored as specified in the proposed Rules for Designated Bank Interiors (Public Hearing June 18, 1996). "Significant features" are defined in Section 9-02 of the Rules.

The staircase, with two landings, has a simple balustrade and handrail of polished, veined marble; the walls of the stairwell are revetted in marble, and the stone floors have narrow geometric borders. At the corresponding center bay of the east elevation is a doorway, (Fig. 3) with a polished marble enframingent surmounted by a curved pediment with a central beribboned cartouche, and a door of paneled wood with carved rosettes. A similar doorway is located in the fifth bay to the north. (Two simple doorways leading to offices are located in the sixth and seventh bays). Paneled marble tellers' counters are located in front of these elevations. (The inner surfaces of the counters are not subject to this designation.)

Montague Street (south) elevation. The main entrance (Fig. 4) to the banking room is located on this elevation. The revetted marble walls with smooth-rusticated pilasters on shallow piers at each corner support a broad, arched architrave, infilled with octagonal coffers and trapezoidal panels. A circular bronze open-work clock is centered above the entrance doorway. The double-height doorway is surrounded by a finely crafted frame. The broad molding of the doorframe is a delicate, cast relief of flowers, leaves and vines, along with classical urns, birds and mythological creatures, ox skulls and cornucopia -- an ancient Roman vocabulary of ornament, revived during the Renaissance. Capped by a Renaissance-style shield, and surrounded with classically-inspired cornices, the doorway is surmounted by a rectangular relief panel, inscribed in Roman lettering, "COMMERCE DEFIES EVERY WIND, OUTRIDES EVERY TEMPEST AND INVADES EVERY ZONE." This inscription is flanked by reliefs of nude classical youths, holding cornucopia and shallow bowls, and surmounted by winged lions to each side of a classical urn. The doorway has a bronze and glass single-height modern revolving door with an original bronze and glass transom above.

Pierrepont Street (north) elevation. This elevation is almost a mirror image of the Montague Street elevation, with a few noteworthy differences. In the panel above the doorway, the inscription proclaims, "SOCIETY IS BUILT UPON TRUST AND TRUST UPON CONFIDENCE IN ONE ANOTHER'S INTEGRITY." Two steps lead to single-height double doors in the original enframingent. These doors are also set below a bronze and glass transom.

Subsequent History

In the summer of 1913, Edwin P. Maynard became bank president.²⁴ Under his administration, the bank continued to flourish. The new Montague Street headquarters were constructed and branch offices in Bay Ridge and Flatbush opened. In 1927 Maynard became Chairman of the Board of Trustees and George L. McLaughlin was appointed president. They were to steer the bank through its period of greatest growth, not only in the final boom years of the late 1920s, but also those of the Great Depression. In 1929, the Mechanics Bank, one of Brooklyn's oldest and largest commercial banks, was consolidated with the Brooklyn Trust. Through further mergers during the 1930s, the bank acquired branches in Queens and Staten Island. In this period the bank had thirty-one branches throughout the city.²⁵ Under McLaughlin, who was a fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers, the bank, continuing its original

concern with estate management, handled the estates of all the baseball club's original owners.²⁶

The Brooklyn Trust Company, through further mergers and acquisitions, became an amalgamation of more than a dozen banking institutions, always retaining its preeminence and founding name. In 1950, a merger with Manufacturers Trust Company, a bank with its own old Brooklyn history, legally ended the separate existence of the Brooklyn Trust Company. In its turn, the Manufacturers Trust merged, in 1961, with the Hanover Bank, forming the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company. Thirty years later, this bank merged with Chemical Bank. The Chemical Bank of today is a descendant and heir to much of the banking history of New York.²⁷

Report prepared by
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Landmarks Consultant

NOTES

1. This discussion is based on Anthony Robins, "Montague Street, Downtown Brooklyn," *Building Blocks of Brooklyn A Study of Urban Growth* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Rediscovery and The Brooklyn Educational Alliance, 1979), 29-62. See also LPC, *Dime Savings Bank Designation Report*, LP-1907 (New York: City of New York, 1994), prepared by David M. Breiner; Clay Lancaster, *Old Brooklyn Heights: New York's First Suburb* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979).
2. Pierrepont envisioned this development as a suburban enclave connected to Manhattan by the Fulton Ferry. See Robins, 31, and Henry R. Stiles, ed. *The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History and Commercial and Industrial Record of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York, from 1683 to 1884* (New York: W. W. Munsell & Co., 1884), 129. This link to Manhattan was further facilitated by the 1853 opening of the Wall Street ferry line at the west end of Montague Street.
3. This history is based on the following sources, some to be more specifically cited below. *Rambles About Historic Brooklyn* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Trust Co., 1916) foreword, and *Historic Brooklyn* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Trust Co., 1941) foreword, the second publication a revised edition of the first; Stiles; *New York Times*, articles from 1873 to 1967; *Brooklyn Trust Company Charter and by-laws* (Brooklyn, 1868); "The Story of Two Buildings; the Brooklyn Trust Company Building and its Original The Palazzo Gran Guardia" (c.1931), typescript, 4.
4. *Rambles and Historic Brooklyn*, v.
5. Many of the original incorporators of the Brooklyn Trust Company merited lengthy biographies in Stiles. Among them: Henry E. Pierrepont; respected scion of a prominent Brooklyn family, his life was "one of trusts." He was involved with the Brooklyn ferry system and deeply committed to the cultural life of his community. He served as president of the Academy of Music and the Brooklyn Club, and was a strong supporter and patron of the Art Association, Mercantile Library, and Long Island Historical Society. He was also a founder of Greenwood Cemetery. (Stiles, 443-444). J. Carson Brevoort; a serious naturalist, numismatist and bibliophile, he served as the first president of the Long Island Historical Society and donated much of his collections and library to the Society and the American Museum of Natural History. (Stiles, 1319-20). Daniel Chauncey; he was a builder who extended his interests to banking and insurance. When the Brooklyn Trust Company "got into trouble" in 1873 he acted with "strict honor...[and] unraveled affairs without compensation." (Stiles, 625-626). Jasper W. Gilbert; a

In New York a number of their buildings have been designated Landmarks, including the New-York Historical Society, the Federal Reserve Bank, the Central Savings Bank, and the Greenwich Savings Bank.

18. Otto Teegen, a draftsman with York & Sawyer, recalled in testimony before the Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1975, that Philp Sawyer used Sanmicheli as a favored source. See LPC, *Central Savings Bank, First Floor Interior, Designation Report*, LP-1804 (New York: City of New York, 1993), prepared by Charles Savage, 11. For Sanmicheli, see Douglas Lewis, "Sanmicheli," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, vol. 3, 648-653.
19. Reed, 460-461. "The Story of Two Buildings"; Photograph of the Palazzo della Gran Guardia with type notes on verso (Director's office, Chemical Bank, 177 Montague). This *palazzo* has also been attributed to a follower of Sanmicheli. Another interesting, closer parallel can be made with a modern *palazzo*-style building which Sawyer could well have known through his travels, the San Carlo Opera House (1810-12) in Naples by Antonio Niccolini. It features a rusticated, arcuated base and a double-height colonnade at the *piano nobile*, with linked two-story fenestration. See H. R. Hitchcock, *Architecture, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 13, 54, pl 23B.
20. Lancaster, 63; Stern, 177-190.
21. This work is attributed to Elmer E. Garnsey whose work also appears in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and the New York Custom House. ("The Story of Two Buildings," typescript, 3). "Painting and decorating" are attributed to Charles Grimmer & Son (LPC files).
22. The eagle is, of course, a national symbol, associated with United States currency. Almost always depicted with outstretched wings -- symbolic of protection -- it is rare to see the eagle at rest. Perhaps here, at the doorway to the bank, the symbolism has more to do with the eagle's famed keen eyesight -- keeping a vigilant "eagle eye" on the bank's security.
23. The most extensive alterations were apparently undertaken in 1953, when the bank was a branch of the Manufacturers Trust Company. This program of "modernization and improvement" is described and illustrated in the *Annual Report* of 1953. It was at this time that the bronze tellers' cages and marble balustrades were removed. A photograph of around 1941 in *Historic Brooklyn*, illustrates the interior before renovation.
24. Maynard, a self-made man, was known at the time of his death as the Brooklyn Borough's "Man of Charity," especially involved with Liberty Loan drives during World War I, and the United Hospital Fund. Rising through the ranks of the Brooklyn Savings Bank, he was made president in 1912, but left to head the Brooklyn Trust. *NYT*, Nov. 11, 1949; 25:1 (obit.)
25. A Brooklyn branch office in Park Slope (Seventh Avenue and Carroll Street) was opened in 1930. It is of special interest because the new building on a corner site, although a more modest brick structure, was modelled in architectural terms after the Montague Street headquarters -- a clear example of "bank imagery" intended to reassure the bank's clientele. For a contemporary illustration, see *Brooklyn Life*, April 26, 1930, cover.
26. McLaughlin, son of a Brooklyn ferry boat captain, earned a law degree and served as City Police Commissioner and later Chairman of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, before his long and successful career in banking. *NYT*, Dec. 8, 1967; 42:1 (obit.)
27. "Growth of a Bank. A history of Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company," *Topics*, 3ff. (Manufacturers Hanover Trust, New York) September, 1962; "Manufacturers Hanover Trust Corporation" [a brief history and charts of merger history], Chemical Bank library archives. See also *NYT*, Jan. 18, 1961: 1:1 and Jan. 1, 1992; I: 47:4.
The author and the Landmarks Preservation Commission wish to thank the following Chemical Bank employees who facilitated access and provided information: Anthony Forte, vice president; Lew Pasquin, Mary Mannion, and Mark Shapiro.



Fig. 1, Brooklyn Trust Company Building
177-179 Montague Street, Brooklyn
Banking hall, view from the south
Photo: Carl Forster



Fig. 3, Brooklyn Trust Company Building
177-179 Montague Street, Brooklyn
Doorway, east elevation
Photo: Carl Forster

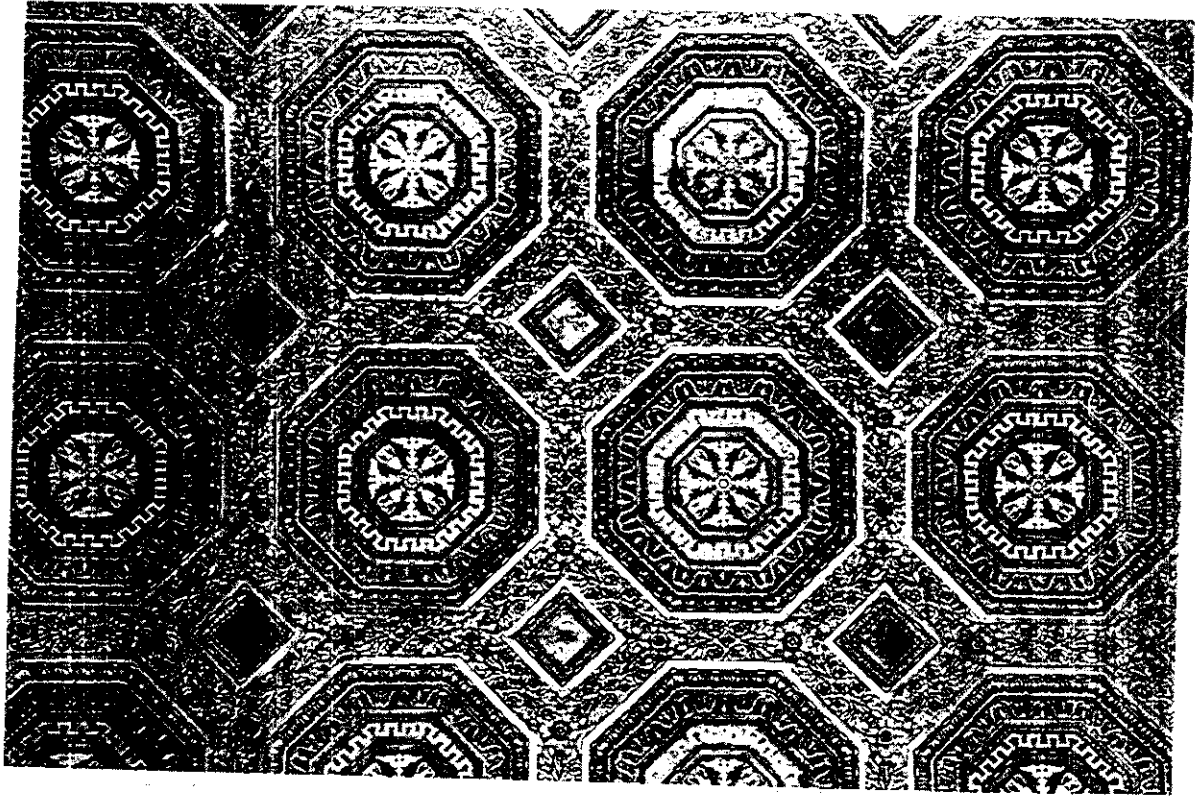


Fig. 5, Brooklyn Trust Company Building
177-179 Montague Street, Brooklyn
Detail of vaulted ceiling in banking room
Photo: Carl Forster

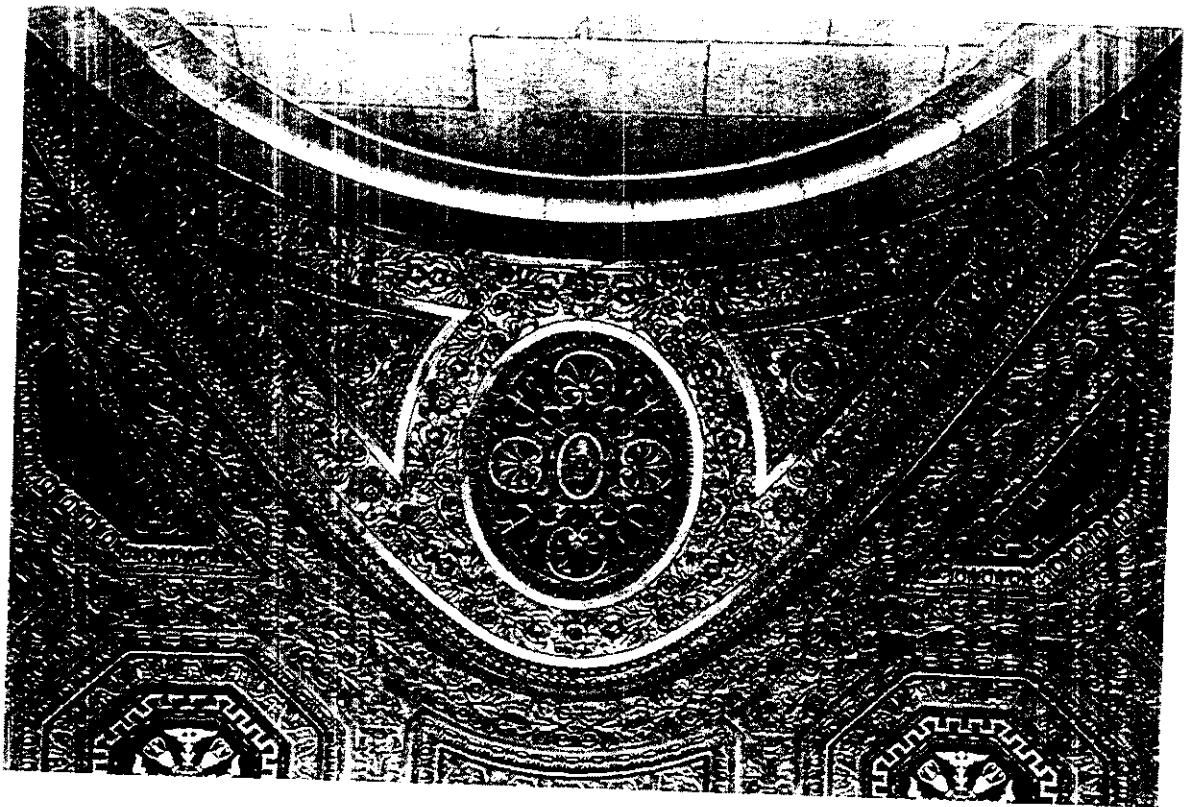


Fig. 6, Brooklyn Trust Company Building
177-179 Montague Street, Brooklyn
Detail of parabolic lunette and oval ventilator grille
Photo: Carl Forster

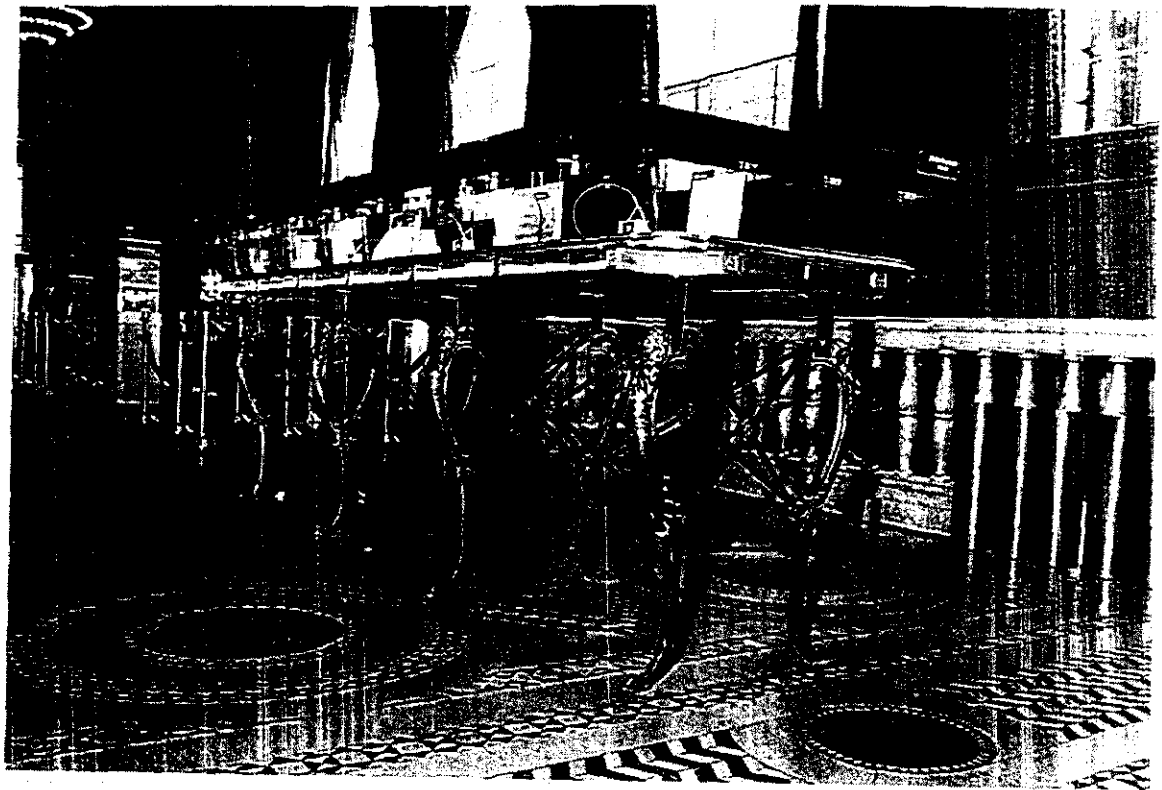


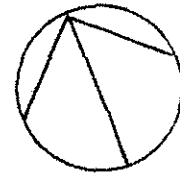
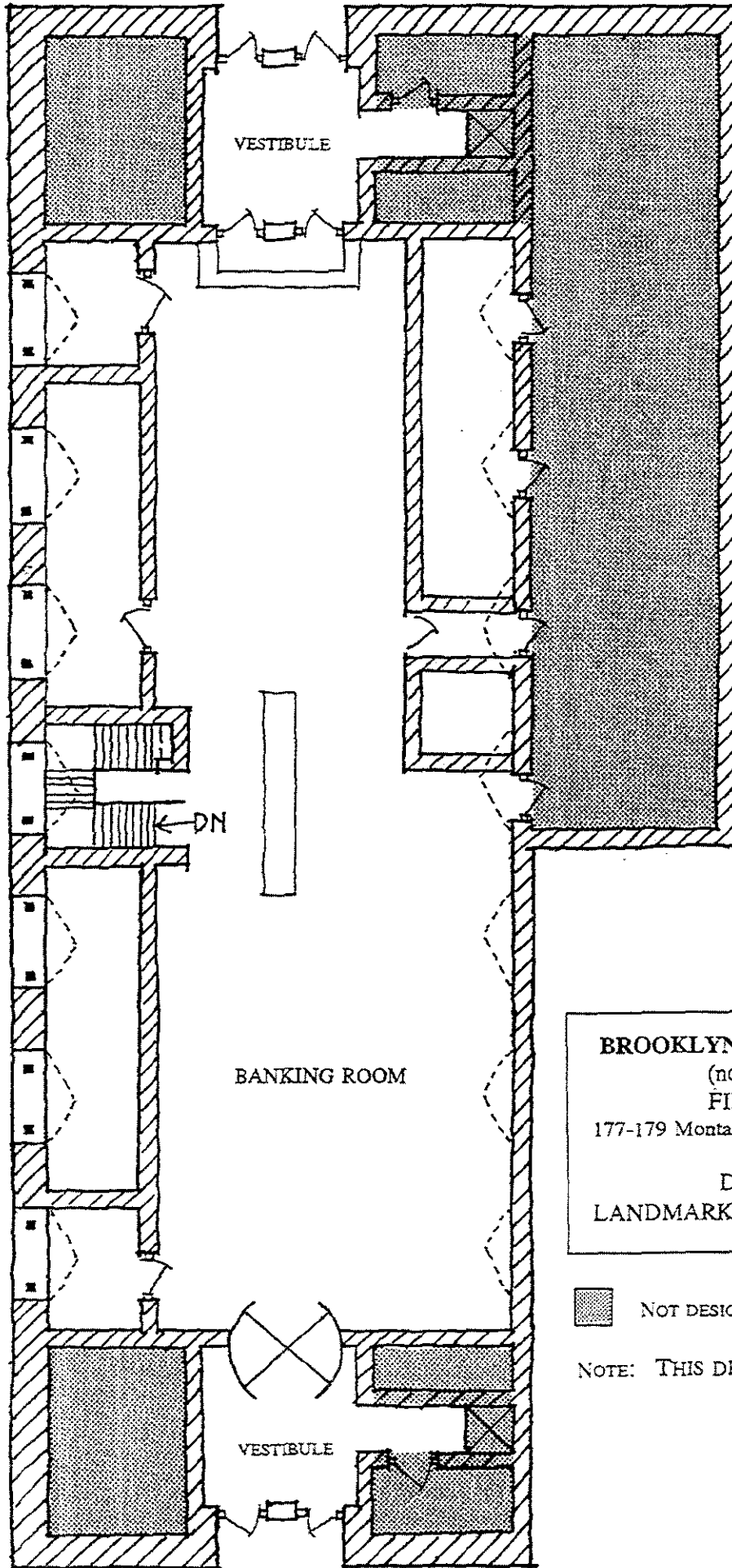
Fig. 8, Brooklyn Trust Company Building
177-179 Montague Street, Brooklyn
Marble mosaic floor and original bronze and glass customer-service writing table
Photo: Carl Forster



Fig. 10, Brooklyn Trust Company Building
177-179 Montague Street, Brooklyn
Detail of eagle in profile
Photo: Carl Forster

PIERREPONT STREET

CLINTON STREET



BROOKLYN TRUST COMPANY BUILDING
 (now **CHEMICAL BANK**)
FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR
 177-179 Montague Street and 134-138 Pierrepoint Street
 BROOKLYN
 Designated June 25, 1996
 LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

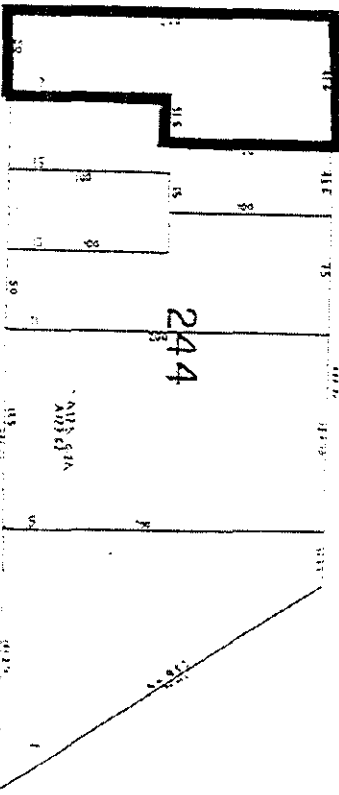
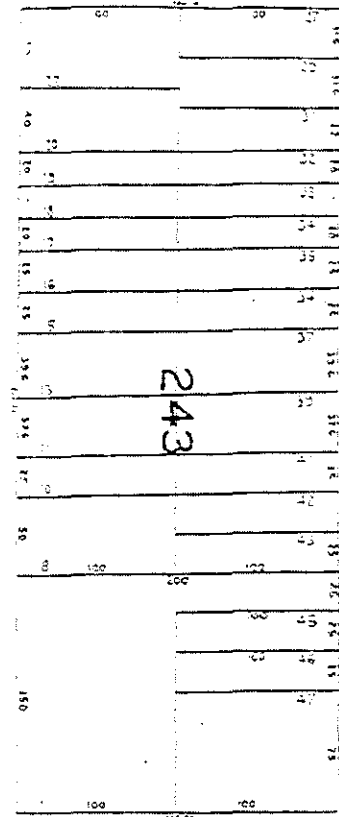
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NOTE: THIS DRAWING IS NOT TO SCALE

MONTAGUE STREET

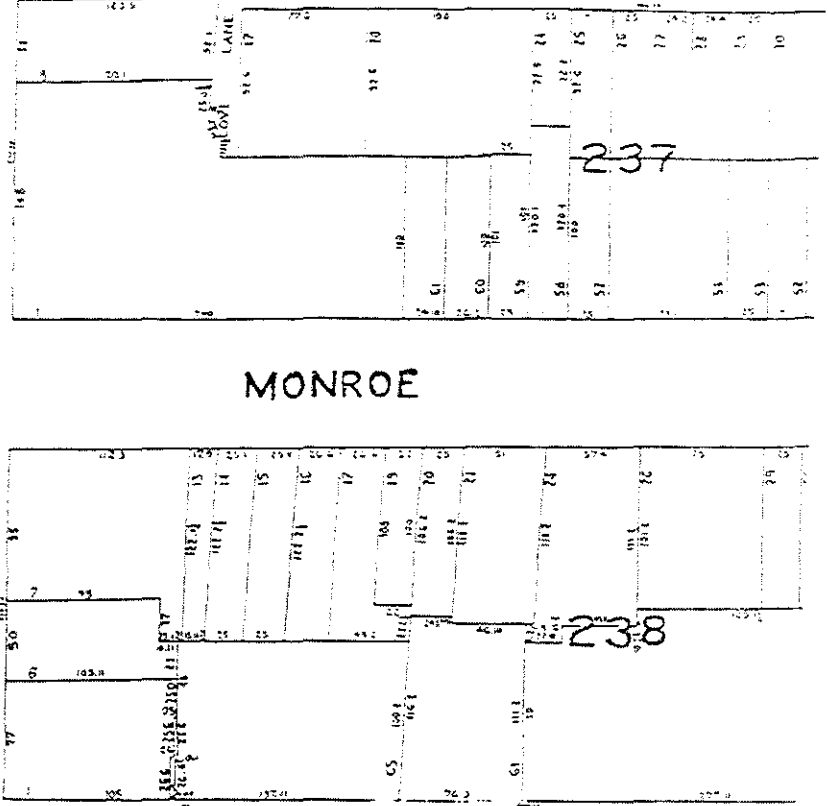
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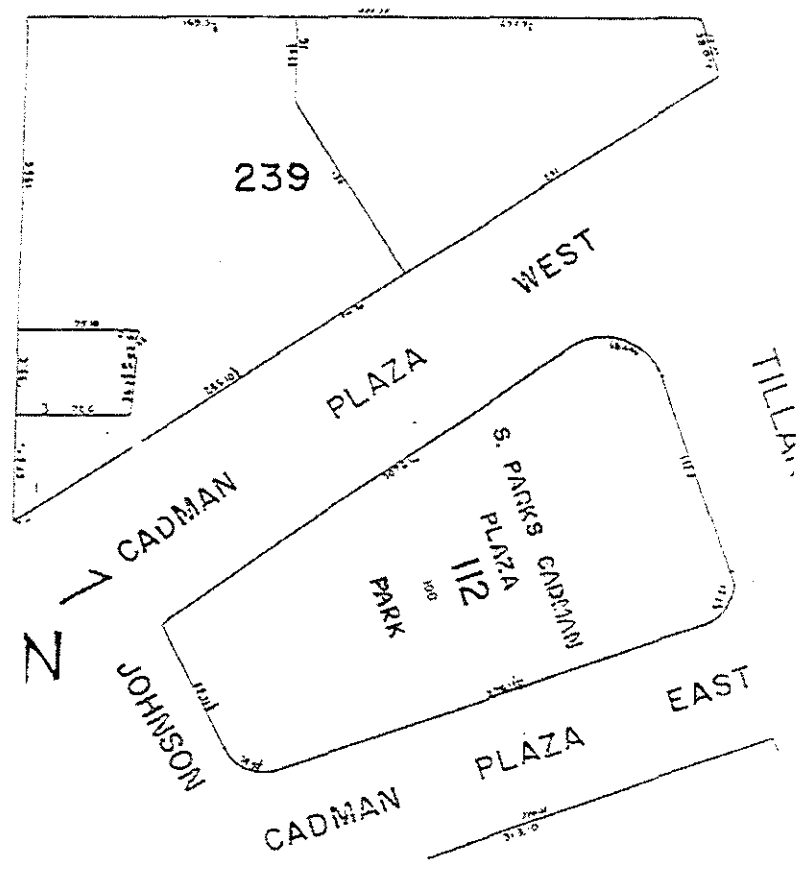
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PIERREPONT



CLINTON

ST.



Brooklyn Trust Company (now Chemical Bank) Building
 177-179 Montague Street and 134-138 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 244, Lot 17
 Source: Dept. of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map