

**BEVERLY HOTEL (now The Benjamin Hotel)**, 125 East 50<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 125-129 East 50<sup>th</sup> Street; 557-565 Lexington Avenue), Manhattan. Built 1926-27; architect, Emery Roth, associate architect, Sylvan Bien

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1305, Lot 20

On July 19, 2016 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Beverly Hotel (now The Benjamin Hotel) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Six people spoke in support of designation including representatives of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer; Manhattan Community Boards 5 and 6, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Municipal Art Society and the Historic Districts Council. Three people spoke in opposition to designation including two representatives of the owners and the representative of the Real Estate Board of New York. In addition, the Commission received a letter from Council Member Daniel Garodnick and two e-mails from individuals in support of designation.

### Summary

Located at the northeast corner of Lexington Avenue and East 50<sup>th</sup> Street and built in 1926-27, this 25-story (plus tower) hotel is one of the premiere hotels constructed along the noted “hotel alley” stretch of the avenue north of Grand Central Terminal. It was built as part of the redevelopment of this section of East Midtown that followed the opening of Grand Central Terminal and the Lexington Avenue subway line. Built after the passage of the 1916 zoning, the romantic tiered massing of the building represents the early evolution of skyscraper design.

The building was erected by the Lexington-Concord Corporation headed by Moses Ginsberg, a leading builder-developer of the period, best known for his Carlyle Hotel (1929-30). Designed as an apartment hotel, the Beverly Hotel was marketed to “sophisticated New Yorkers” and featured a number of amenities, notably its “many sunny outdoor terraces.”

Above a handsome two-story arcaded limestone base (largely reconstructed) the upper stories of grayish-brown brick terminate in a series of skillfully modeled setbacks that rise toward a lofty octagonal tower with wheel windows that is topped by a pavilion with tile roof and copper finial. The Beverly Hotel is richly ornamented with stylized Romanesque motifs and incorporates details such as pelican and owl sculptures and warrior-head corbels.

The hotel’s distinctive profile made it a favorite subject for American artists of the 1920s, including Georgia O’Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz, and Charles Sheeler. Later historians have also recognized the building’s design. In *Mansions in the Clouds*, his monograph on Emery Roth,



New York City's preeminent apartment house designer of the interwar years, Steven Rutenbaum described the Beverly Hotel as "one of Roth's most successful creations."

In 1997, the Beverly Hotel was acquired by a company associated with the Denihan family and renamed "The Benjamin" in honor of its founder, Benjamin Denihan, Sr. The building underwent extensive facade repairs and sensitive renovations in 1998-99 including the reconstruction of the base on Lexington Avenue to a modified version of its historic appearance. The present vertical illuminated sign, which replaced an earlier post-1940 sign, dates to that time.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Located on the northeast corner of 50<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue, the Beverly Hotel (now The Benjamin Hotel), is a 25-story and tower<sup>1</sup>, neo-Romanesque style skyscraper with irregular setbacks that rise to the slender octagonal water tower capped by a pavilion. Above the two-story limestone base, the façades are mostly textured, grayish-brown brick. Setbacks incorporate terraces on three sides. The water tower incorporates wheel windows on each face, the pavilion at its apex has arched windows with fan tympana and the various pitched roofs have reddish tiles, the roof of the tower is topped by a copper finial. Most of the ornament is terra cotta and cast stone. The north elevation has no setbacks until the 25<sup>th</sup> story and the first six stories are windowless. The east façade has a light court and the lot line wall sets back at the 23<sup>rd</sup> story. The two-story base has many replacement elements that resemble the original features. The Lexington Avenue base had been heavily altered at one time; the two-story arched openings with tripartite arched fenestration topped by sculptures of pelicans and owls, foliate corbels and shouldered-arch window openings at the second story as well as the double-arched entrances at the corners have been reconstructed with some modification. The granite water table, illuminated vertical sign with clock, marquee and aluminum double hung windows are not original. Through-wall air conditioning units have replaced some decorative elements. Various repairs have been made to the brick and mortar and at the time of designation additional repairs are being made.

### **East 50<sup>th</sup> Street facade:**

*Historic:* Two-story arched openings with tripartite arched fenestration at second story topped by keystones with alternating sculptures of pelicans and owls resting on foliate corbels; shouldered-arch window openings at second story (end bays) with engaged decorative columns and sills with arched corbel tables; corbel courses between second and third stories and at setbacks; windows at third story with terra-cotta surrounds with decorative mullions (center bays) or warrior-head corbels (end bays); windows at fourth story with sills with corbel tables and spandrels with plaques and rosettes; band course at fifth story incorporating projecting spandrels with roundels supported on carved sills with stylized modillions; arcaded windows at 14<sup>th</sup> story with arched lintels supported on columns and imposts, spandrel panels with rosettes and corbel tables incorporating balconettes (center bays); flat head windows at 15<sup>th</sup> story with full surrounds and rosette decorated lintels and paired arcaded windows at 16<sup>th</sup> story with arched lintels supported on columns and imposts, 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-story windows at corners set in terra-cotta panels with decorative piers with pelicans; balustraded spandrels and open balustrades with cartouches at 15<sup>th</sup> story; windows set in terra-cotta surrounds with rosette decorated spandrels and balconette in center bays of the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> stories; niches with pelicans and porticoed terraces at 19<sup>th</sup> story;

angled bay at 20<sup>th</sup> story with arcaded windows, corbel course and balconette; arcaded windows with balconettes at 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> stories; crenelated setbacks at the uppermost levels.

*Alterations:* Double arches with roundels and bas-relief design at corners are reconstructions; first story of two-story arches converted to storefront; bronze-and-glass marquee; entrance reconfigured; doors replaced; signs flanking entrance; display box and service door within reconstructed arches on east; windows at second story with snap-in muntins; vents in base and tower; camera; perforated vents and remote utility meters; flag poles date to at least the 1980s; lights; fences at setbacks

### **Lexington Avenue facade:**

*Historic:* Arched corbel courses between second and third stories and at setbacks; windows at third story with terra-cotta surrounds with decorative mullions (center bays) or warrior-head corbels (end bays); windows at fourth story with sills with corbel tables and spandrels with plaques and rosettes; band course at fifth story incorporating projecting spandrels with roundels supported on carved sill with stylized modillions; arcaded windows at 14<sup>th</sup> story with arched lintels supported on columns and imposts, spandrel panels with rosettes and corbel tables incorporating balconettes (center bays); flat head windows at 15<sup>th</sup> story with full surrounds and rosette decorated lintels and arcaded windows at 16<sup>th</sup> story with arched lintels supported on columns and imposts, 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-story windows at corners set in terra-cotta panels with decorative piers with pelicans; balustraded spandrels and open balustrades with cartouches at 15<sup>th</sup> story; windows set in terra-cotta surrounds with rosette decorated spandrels and balconettes in center bays of the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> stories; piers decorated by niches with pelicans and topped by finials (17<sup>th</sup> story); plaque with robed figure (19<sup>th</sup> story); porticoed terraces at 19<sup>th</sup> story with balconettes with rosettes; angled bay at 20<sup>th</sup> story with arcaded windows, corbel course and balconette; arcaded windows with balconettes at 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> stories; crenelated setbacks at the uppermost levels; freestanding chimney with decorative cap

*Alterations:* Base reconstructed below corbel table, first story of arched openings accommodate storefronts; revolving doors; entrance relocated; globe light fixtures; awnings; flagpoles; recessed service entrance set into double arch at north end; security camera; display box

## **SITE HISTORY**

### Evolution of East Midtown<sup>2</sup>

#### *Pre-Grand Central Era*

In 1831, the recently-established New York & Harlem Railroad signed an agreement with New York State permitting the operation of steam locomotives on Fourth (now Park) Avenue, from 23<sup>rd</sup> Street to the Harlem River. Five years later, in 1836, several important street openings occurred in East Midtown. These included 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Lexington Avenue and Madison Avenue. Initially, trains ran at grade, sharing Fourth Avenue with pedestrians and vehicles. In 1856, locomotives were banned below 42<sup>nd</sup> Street – the current site of a maintenance barn and fuel lot. Though rail passengers continued south by horse car, this decision set the stage for East Midtown to become an important transit hub.

Cornelius Vanderbilt acquired control of the New York & Harlem, Hudson River, and the New York Central Railroads in 1863-67. Under his direction, a single terminal for the three railroads was planned and built, known as Grand Central Depot (1868-71, demolished). It was a

large structure, consisting of an L-shaped head-house inspired by the Louvre in Paris, with entrances on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Vanderbilt Avenue, as well as a 652-foot-long train shed. The area immediately north, mainly between 45<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Streets, served as a train yard. Traversed by pedestrian and vehicular bridges, this busy facility occupied an irregularly-shaped site that extended from Lexington to Madison Avenue.

The earliest surviving buildings in midtown are residences in Murray Hill, directly south of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. An 1847 covenant stipulated that all houses be built with brick and stone and many handsome examples survive, particularly on the blocks east of Park Avenue. Following the end of the Civil War, residential development continued up Fifth Avenue, transforming the area between St Patrick's Cathedral (1853-88) and Central Park (begun 1857) (both are designated New York City Landmarks). Though most of the large mansions – many owned by members of the Vanderbilt family – have been lost, impressive residences survive on the side streets, between Park and Fifth Avenues. New York City Landmarks that are located in the East 50s include: the Villard Houses (1882-85), William & Ada Moore House (1898-1900), Morton & Nellie Plant House (1903-05), and the Fisk-Harkness House (1871/1906).

### *Terminal City*

In 1902, 15 railroad passengers were killed in a rear-end collision in the Park Avenue Tunnel, near 56<sup>th</sup> Street. In response to this tragic accident, William J. Wilgus, chief engineer of the New York Central Railroad, proposed that not only should steam locomotives be eliminated from Manhattan but that the terminal be expanded and completely rebuilt. The city agreed and Grand Central Terminal (a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark) was completed in February 1913.

Wilgus envisioned the terminal as part of a city-within-the city, knitted together by more than two dozen buildings constructed above the newly-submerged rail tracks. Faced with tan brick and limestone, these handsome neo-classical style Terminal City buildings formed an understated back drop to the monumental Beaux-Arts style terminal. A key example is the New York Central Building, a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark. Erected by the railroad in 1927-29, it stands directly above the tracks and incorporates monumental archways that direct automobile traffic towards the Park Avenue Viaduct (1917-19, a New York City Landmark).

The new terminal and subway attracted considerable commercial development to East Midtown, especially near 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, the original route of the IRT subway. Most of these buildings date to the 1910s and 1920s. In contrast to the neo-classical, City Beautiful, aesthetics that shaped Terminal City, these distinctive skyscrapers frequently incorporate unusual terra-cotta ornamentation inspired by medieval (and later, Art Deco) sources. Memorable examples include: the Bowery Savings Bank Building (1921-23, 1931-33) and the Chanin Building (1927-29), both New York City Landmarks.

In 1918, subway service was extended up Lexington Avenue, north of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Though Terminal City was planned with several hotels, such as the Biltmore and Commodore (both have been re-clad), additional rooms were needed. A substantial number of hotels would rise on Lexington Avenue between 47<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> Streets, near the Grand Central Palace which brought thousands of travelers to the area for trade fairs and events such as the Westminster Kennel Club Show. Among the hotels that catered to this business were the Lexington and later the Shelton.

## *Post World War II*

Following the end of the Second World War, the New York Central Railroad struggled with debt and entered a significant period of decline. In response, it began to terminate lot leases and sell off real estate properties. The impact of the situation was most powerfully felt on Park Avenue. Apartment buildings and hotels were replaced with new glass-curtain-wall office buildings, with such pioneering mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Modern works as Lever House (1949-52, a New York City Landmark) and the Seagram Building (1954-56, New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark). The success of these and other projects helped make Park Avenue (and East Midtown) one of Manhattan's most prestigious corporate addresses.

## Lexington Avenue

In 1832 the New York State legislature created Lexington Avenue and in 1836, along with Madison Avenue which paralleled it to the west, it was opened to 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Two years later the Legislature authorized the extension of Lexington Avenue north to 66<sup>th</sup> Street; however, that section was not opened until 1851.<sup>3</sup> By 1859 several institutions had established themselves in the blocks between Lexington Avenue and the railroad tracks including the Lexington Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church (later Swedish Methodist-Episcopal Church) at Lexington Avenue and 52<sup>nd</sup> Street (1846, demolished), the Orphan's Home & Asylum of the Protestant Episcopal Church at 49<sup>th</sup> Street (c. 1859, later enlarged, demolished), and the Lexington Avenue Presbyterian Church, Lexington Avenue and 46<sup>th</sup> Street (c. 1859, demolished). On the east side of the avenue, the Nursery and Child's Hospital was established on 51<sup>st</sup> Street (c. 1855, demolished). However, Lexington Avenue itself between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> Streets was largely undeveloped, with most residential buildings and small businesses established to the east on Third and Second Avenues.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area east of the railroad north of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street was lined with railroad facilities, hotels, warehouses, factories, large institutions and modest dwellings. Larger industrial and institutional structures continued to be located in the blocks immediately adjacent to the railroad including the Grand Central Hotel, New York Central and Harlem River Railroad freight depot and two engine houses, American Express, the New York State Women's Hospital, F. & M. Schaefer Brewing Company, and Steinway and Sons the piano manufacturers. The blockfronts along both sides of Lexington Avenue and the adjacent side streets had by then been developed with brick and brownstone-fronted houses and tenements.<sup>5</sup>

## Development of Hotels in New York City<sup>6</sup>

Hotels played an important role in the life of the city through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For many years the Astor House, built in 1836 by Isaiah Rogers, located on Broadway between Barclay and Vesey Streets was the city's most renowned hotel. By 1859, the Fifth Avenue Hotel, called "the first modern New York Hotel," opened on Madison Square, offering its patrons amenities such as New York's first passenger elevator and luxuriously decorated interiors. During the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hotels became increasingly larger and more luxurious, culminating in architect Henry J. Hardenbergh's Waldorf Hotel and Astoria Hotel. The Waldorf and Astoria complex, however, was not the only grand hotel built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fostered by economic prosperity, the large luxury hotels of this period became the venue for public life, supplying halls for promenading, dining rooms to be seen in, and private rooms in which to entertain and be entertained.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tendency was observed to “include within the walls of the building all the possible comforts of modern life, facilities which formerly could be found only beyond the hotel walls. Telephones, Turkish baths, private nurses, physicians...” in addition to laundry, maids, valets, barbers, hairdressers, and shoe-shine boys. A large staff was required to supply such services, which in turn necessitated a building that was large enough to make the whole enterprise financially sound.

The exterior design of the Waldorf and Astoria Hotels included warm-colored brick, elaborate ornament, and a strong roofline and it provided an influential stylistic exemplar for the many hotels that followed. In 1905, the architectural critic A. C. David proclaimed that the large, new American hotels were “in a different class architecturally from any similar buildings which have preceded them.” These tall buildings were constructed with steel-frames, like skyscrapers, but were created “in such a manner that it would be distinguished from the office-building and suggest some relation to domestic life.” David praised the use of warm materials, especially brick, and admired the strong roof lines.

In the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new hotel construction centered on the city’s two rail hubs Pennsylvania Station and Grand Central Terminal. Around Terminal City Warren & Wetmore built a succession of relatively small hotels designed to give guests a sense of domesticity including the Biltmore (1913, re-clad) and the Hotels Chatham and Ambassador (1917 and 1921 respectively, both demolished) all of them offering guests multi-room suites. Following the war, as New York City became a commercial as well as tourist center attracting larger number of visitors, developers took advantage of the new zoning ordinance to create what became known as skyscraper hotels. By 1924 two of the largest hotels were being constructed in the Terminal City/Lexington Avenue area: the 22-story, 1,100-room Roosevelt Hotel (G. B. Post) to the west of Grand Central Terminal, the first hotel designed with integrated retail space, and the 31-story plus penthouse, 1,200-room Shelton Club Hotel the first one built on the east side of Lexington Avenue. In the Shelton “one could see the new zoning laws skillfully translated into a complexly massed, powerfully modeled composition that combined bold scale with a fine sense of detail so that the building’s appeal was not only as a virtually lone icon on the east midtown skyline, but also as a subtle insertion into the architecture of the city’s streets.”<sup>7</sup> The Shelton set the standard for the skyscraper hotels that lined Lexington Avenue such as the Beverly and Hotel Lexington (1928-29, Schultze & Weaver), as well as others of the type built elsewhere in the city.

Some of the early skyscraper hotels, including the Beverly Hotel, were in a special class known as apartment or residential hotels a hybrid type that was an immensely popular multiple dwelling type during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Offering more privacy than rooming houses and better accommodations for long-term occupants than transient hotels, residential hotels were equipped with standard hotel facilities such as imposing lobbies and well-appointed dining rooms and provided hotel services including doormen, receptionists and cleaners. They ranged from palatial residences for the wealthy with large suites of rooms with private baths (but usually pantries rather than kitchens) to one or two bedroom apartments usually occupied by single people and childless couples actively pursuing business careers; to single-room residences with both private and shared baths, which were marketed primarily to young men and women just establishing their careers. Apartment hotels were found in most cities in the United States, but were particularly popular in New York City where apartments without individual kitchens were exempt from the height limitations and fireproofing restrictions imposed by the Tenement House Act of 1901. Many developers took advantage of this loophole and the number of

apartment hotels multiplied until the passage of the Multiple Dwelling Act of 1929 altered height and bulk restrictions and permitted “skyscraper” apartment buildings for the first time, eliminating the economic advantages of apartment hotels.

### Emery Roth<sup>9</sup>

Emery Roth (1871-1948) was born in Galzecs, Hungary to a Jewish family of ample means. Their circumstances changed dramatically after the death of his father when Emery was thirteen and his mother decided that her son should immigrate alone to America. With painting and drawing as his hobbies and no formal training, he found work with an architect in Bloomington, Illinois. He spent three years there, where he learned the classical orders by copying plates, and worked with a local builder to learn construction as well. Roth eventually accepted a position as a draftsman with Burnham & Root, working on the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Roth assisted Jules Harder with the drawings for the celebrated Palace of Fine Arts and drew plans for two other small pavilions. He also assisted Richard Morris Hunt with modifications to his plans for the Administration Building, impressing the architect so much that Hunt promised him a job if he ever came to New York.

Unable to get work in Chicago after the fair, Roth moved to New York and was hired to work in Hunt’s office. While drafting interior perspectives for the Breakers, the Newport, Rhode Island mansion of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Roth became acquainted with Ogden Codman, a noted architect, interior designer and socialite. After Hunt’s death Roth accepted a position with Codman under whose tutelage he became more familiar with historical styles.

In 1898, Roth purchased the architectural practice of Theodore G. Stein & Eugene Yancy Cohen for \$1,000. Their agreement allowed Roth to represent himself as a partner in Stein, Cohen & Roth in order to capitalize on the established name of the firm; in reality, Roth worked on his own. The firm is credited with the Irving Place Theater (1899-1900, demolished) and the Saxony Apartments (1901, 250 West 82<sup>nd</sup> Street included in the Riverside-West End Historic District Extension I), Roth’s first apartment house design.

Roth’s first major commission under his own name was the Hotel Belleclaire (1901-03, 2171-2179 Broadway, a designated New York City Landmark) which exhibits elements of the French Beaux Arts and Viennese Secession styles. Shortly thereafter he was commissioned by the real estate developers Leo and Alexander Bing to design a series of apartment buildings in Washington Heights, beginning a close association and enabling Roth to continually refine his apartment house designs. During the 1920s, with an apartment building boom occurring in New York, Roth created numerous small hotels and apartment buildings, for the Bing brothers as well as larger ones for other developers such as Samuel Minskoff and Harris H. Uris. During this time his designs became more classically-inspired, while also incorporating elements of the Art Deco style.

At the time he was designing the Beverly Hotel, Roth was also commissioned to design the Ritz Tower (a designated New York City Landmark) for the journalist/developer Arthur Brisbane, one of his first luxury residential skyscrapers. With a reputation as a designer of luxury residential buildings, Roth designed the Oliver Cromwell Hotel on West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street (1928, within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District), the San Remo Apartments (1929-30, 145 Central Park West, a designated New York City Landmark), the Beresford (1928-29, 211 Central Park West, a designated New York City Landmark), the Eldorado Apartments (1929-31, 300 Central Park West, in association with architects Margon & Holder, a designated

New York City Landmark) and many other buildings within the Upper West Side/Central Park West, Riverside/West End and expanded Carnegie Hill Historic Districts.

After 1932, the name of the firm changed to Emery Roth & Sons to reflect the addition of Roth's two sons, and later his grandson. The Normandy Apartments (1938-39, a designated New York City Landmark) was created by this firm and is considered one of Roth's last great apartment house designs. The younger Roths continued a prolific and successful practice after their father's death in 1947, creating numerous office towers in the contemporary idiom.

From the 1920s on, the signature of a major Roth apartment house was its tower(s). Initially designed to conceal water tanks, the towers evolved into a major design element, fusing the functional with the aesthetic. In another innovation, Roth's sons credit their father with the creation of the foyer plan for his apartments. Roth's best apartment designs reduced wasteful corridor space to a minimum and replaced it with spacious well-lit rooms.

### Sylvan Bien<sup>10</sup>

Born in Austria, Sylvan Bien (1892-1959) immigrated to San Francisco, California in 1909. He studied at the University of California at Berkeley and his first work in the United States was in San Francisco, where he assisted Houghton Sawyer on the designs of the Panama-Pacific Exposition. Around 1916, Bien left California and spent two years in New Orleans before arriving in New York where he entered the office of Warren & Wetmore in 1919, a position he maintained until 1922. While working for Warren & Wetmore, Bien assisted on the design of the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. Bien worked for two years as a draftsman with Frank M. Andrews before joining the Emery Roth firm in the same position in 1924. In 1926, the year Bien left Roth's office to establish his own practice, he is listed as associate architect with Roth in the design of the Beverly Hotel.<sup>11</sup> Bien practiced independently except for a period in the late 1920s early 1930s when he was in partnership with Joseph Prince with whom he designed the Hotel Carlyle. He later worked in association with the noted architectural firm Shreve, Lamb & Harmon and William F. R. Ballard in the design of the Vladek Houses one of New York City's early public housing projects. Many examples of Bien's designs can be found within the Upper East Side Historic District as well as Schwab House (285 West End Avenue) and the former Godmothers League Shelter for Babies (255 West 71<sup>st</sup> Street) both in the West End-Collegiate Historic District Extension.

Bien furthered his architectural studies at the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects and Columbia University. His early designs were executed in historical styles however his works in the 1940s and 1950s, such as the two buildings in the West End-Collegiate Historic District Extension, and the Grolier Office Buildings at 575 Lexington Avenue (c. 1959, re-clad) with his son Robert L. Bien were in a distinctly Modern vocabulary.

### Beverly Hotel

The Beverly Hotel was designed by Emery Roth, New York City's preeminent apartment house designer of the interwar years, in association with Sylvan Bien. In *Mansions in the Clouds*, Steven Ruttonbaum's monograph on Emery Roth, he describes the Beverly Hotel, as "one of Roth's most successful creations...its silhouette and its details, both exterior and interior, exhibited an abundance of vitality and sumptuous warmth."<sup>12</sup> Rising above a handsome two-story arcaded limestone base (now largely reconstructed) the upper stories, clad in grayish-brown brick, terminate in a skillfully modeled series of setbacks rising to a lofty octagonal tower lit by wheel windows and topped by a red-tile roof with copper finial, the Beverly Hotel is richly

ornamented with stylized Romanesque motifs and incorporates details such as pelican and owl sculptures and warrior-head corbels.

Located at the northeast corner of Lexington Avenue and East 50<sup>th</sup> Street and built in 1926-27 as an apartment hotel, the Beverly was part of the development of this section of East Midtown spurred by the northward extension of the Lexington Avenue subway line and the construction of Terminal City over the New York Central Rail Road tracks directly to the west. The building was erected by the Lexington-Concord Corporation, headed by Moses Ginsberg, a leading builder/developer of the period, best known for his Carlyle Hotel (1929-30, Bien & Prince). Marketed as a residence of social prestige and sophistication, the neo-Romanesque style Beverly offered one- to four-room apartments with private baths and serving pantries with refrigerators, some apartments also included dining areas where residents could enjoy meals provided by the Beverly's restaurant.<sup>13</sup> Above the 15<sup>th</sup> story, the building's various setbacks provided the adjoining apartments with space for private terraces and roof gardens. Prominent among the Beverly's residents were Admiral Richard E. Byrd, the polar explorer; General and Mrs. Douglas McArthur; Lionel Atwill, British actor; Mrs. Birdsall O. Edey; Jacob K. Lasser, accountant and publisher of tax preparation guides and his family; and Chester Dale, banker and art collector.<sup>14</sup>

#### Beverly Hotel: Later History

The Beverly Hotel changed ownership and management several times over the years. The hotel's limestone base, particularly on the Lexington Avenue side was replaced by a new facade in an unsympathetic design. In 1997 the building was acquired by Manhattan East Suite Hotels, a family-owned hotel corporation, adding it to their existing portfolio of nine New York City hotels. Manhattan East, now the Denihan Hospitality Group, renovated the building into a luxury hotel, updating its rooms and suites, creating new public areas and reconstructing the base of the building to a close copy of its original appearance.<sup>15</sup> In honor of the company's founder Benjamin J. Denihan Sr., the hotel was renamed "The Benjamin." Today the hotel, whose design attracted artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe who captured it in her painting *New York at Night* and Alfred Stieglitz in "From My Window at the Shelton, North" (1931) continues to be "one of New York's most romantically styled towers, a rich ornament in the city scape."<sup>16</sup>

Report prepared by  
Marianne S. Percival  
Evolution of East Midtown  
by Matthew A. Postal  
Research Department

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Based on New York City, Department of Buildings, Certificate of Occupancy 13135, issued October 24, 1927. Certificate of Occupancy 119410, issued May 5, 2000 omits 13 from the enumeration of the floors referring to the last habitable floor as the 26<sup>th</sup>. Emery Roth's drawings label all floors of the building, the last story of the tower being labeled as the 29<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> This section is mostly based on designation reports prepared by members of the research staff at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Also see Kurt C. Schlichting, *Grand Central Terminal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Robert A. M. Stern and others, *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999); Robert A. M. Stern and others, *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture*

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and Urbanism (New York: Rizzoli Books, 1983) and Robert A. M. Stern and others, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli Books, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> I. N. Phelps Stokes, *Iconography of Manhattan Island* (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1928), 6: 596.

<sup>4</sup> David Dunlap, *From Abyssinian to Zion: A Guide to Manhattan's Houses of Worship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 130, 241; *King's Handbook of New York City: An Outline History and Description of the American Metropolis* (Boston: Moses King, 1892; reprinted New York: Barnes & Noble, 2001), 394-5, 440; Matthew Perris, *Maps of the City of New York* (New York: Matthew Perris, 1859), v. 5, pl. 80, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Grand Central Terminal Interior Designation Report (LP-1009)* (New York: City of New York, 1980) prepared by Nancy Goeschel, 2-3; George W. and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of New York: Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley & Co., 1899), v. 2, pl. 32, 35.

<sup>6</sup> This section was adapted from LPC, *Hotel Martinique Designation Report (LP-1983)* (New York: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Virginia Kurshan and included the following sources: A. C. David, "Three New Hotels," *Architectural Record* 17 (March 1905), 167-188; William Hutchins, "New York Hotels I," *Architectural Record* 12 (October 1902), 459-471; Hutchins, "New York Hotels II," *Architectural Record* 12 (November 1902), 621-635; and *New York 1900*, 253-272.

<sup>7</sup> This section based on *New York 1930*, 201-3, 208, 212. The quotation is found on p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> This discussion of apartment hotels is based on Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 188-202; Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 56-87; LPC, (*Former*) *Yale Club of New York City Building (now Penn Club of New York) Designation Report (LP-2379)*, prepared by Jay Shockley (New York: City of New York, 2010), 3-4; *New York 1930*, 206-208.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Rutenbaum, *Mansions in the Clouds: The Skyscraper Palazzi of Emery Roth* (New York: Balsam Press, 1986); "Emery Roth Dies: Noted Architect," *New York Times (NYT)*, August 21, 1948, 16; "Emery Roth and Sons Mark 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary," *Architectural Record* 113 (May 1963), 26; LPC, Architects Files.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Gray, "For an Architect of the 60s, Simplicity Works Best," *NYT*, December 31, 2000, RE7; LPC, "Architects' Appendix," *Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (LP-1051)* (New York: City of New York, 1981), prepared by the Research Department; LPC, *West End-Collegiate Historic District Extension Designation Report (LP-2462)* (New York: City of New York, 2013), prepared by Cynthia Danza and Jennifer L. Most; *American Architects Directory* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1956), 43; "Sylvan Bien, 66 Noted Architect," *NYT*, May 13, 1959, 37; Sylvan Bien, Membership Files, The American Institute of Architects Archives, *The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects*, s. v. "Bien, Sylvan" (ahd1003506) <http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/ahd1003506.aspx> (accessed December 16, 2015)

<sup>11</sup> Bien continued to be associated with the Beverly, being hired for several alterations through 1951, including a solarium on the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor (1929-31, Bien & Prince). New York City, Department of Buildings, Alteration Permits 1919-1929, 2001-1935, 1880-1946, 2220-1948, and 1357-1951.

<sup>12</sup> Rutenbaum, 115. The architectural critic of *The New Yorker*, T-Square [pseud. of George Chappell] called the Beverly an example of Emery Roth "in his least restrained mood." "The Sky Line," *The New Yorker* (April 9, 1927), 97.

<sup>13</sup> Display ads, *NYT*, March 22, 1928, 3 and *New York Sun*, May 2, 1928, 22; W. Parker Chase, *New York the Wonder City... in the Year 1932* (New York: Wonder City Publishing, 1931), 132.

<sup>14</sup> Birdsall O. Edey was the widow of financier Frederic Edey. The Edey's former residence at 10 West 56<sup>th</sup> Street is a designated New York City Landmark. "Has Prominent Tenants," *New York Evening Post*, October 8, 1927, 10; LPC, *Frederick C. and Birdsall Otis Edey Residence Designation Report (LP-2226)* (New York: City of New York, 2007), prepared by Theresa C. Noonan; Dau's *Blue Book*, 1928-1930; "Lasser Dies: His Tax Books Sold Millions," *NYT*, May 12, 1954, 22.

<sup>15</sup> "Metro Business," *NYT*, November 25, 1997, B6; Janet Riorko, "From Beverly to Benjamin," *NYT*, May 16, 1999, TR32.

<sup>16</sup> Rutenbaum, 115. Charles Sheeler's photograph "Beverly Apartment Hotel" (1927) showing the final stages of construction was probably a commission by the American Institute of Steel Construction. *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 18 (1990), 207-208.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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

The Commission further finds that the neo-Romanesque style Beverly Hotel (now The Benjamin Hotel) is one of the premiere hotels constructed in the 1920s and 1930s as part of Lexington Avenue's "hotel alley"; that it reflects the redevelopment of Lexington Avenue following the construction of Grand Central Terminal and the completion of the Lexington Avenue subway; that its tiered massing represents the early evolution of skyscraper design following the passage of the 1916 zoning law; that the design by Emery Roth, New York's preeminent apartment house designer of the time, features facades richly decorated with Romanesque motifs and a skillfully modeled series of setbacks terminating in a tall octagonal tower with wheel windows; that it was the subject of artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz and Charles Sheeler; that it was designed as an apartment hotel marketed to sophisticated New Yorkers; that prominent among its residents were Admiral Richard E. Byrd, polar explorer, General and Mrs. Douglas MacArthur, Lionel Atwill, British actor, Mrs. Birdsall Otis Edey, Chester Dale, banker and art collector, and Jacob K. Lasser, accountant and publisher; that the limestone base along Lexington Avenue has been sensitively reconstructed emulating the original design; that the Beverly Hotel has been renamed The Benjamin in honor of Benjamin J. Denihan, Sr., founder of the Denihan Hospitality Group the hotel's current owners.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Beverly Hotel (now the Benjamin Hotel), 125 East 50<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 125-129 East 50<sup>th</sup> Street; 557-565 Lexington Avenue), Borough of Manhattan and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1305, Lot 20 as its Landmark Site.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair  
Diana Chapin, Wellington Chen,  
Michael Devonshire, Michael Goldblum, John Gustafsson,  
Adi Shamir-Baron, Kim Vauss, Commissioners



Beverly Hotel (now The Benjamin Hotel)  
125 East 50<sup>th</sup> Street (aka 125-129 East 50<sup>th</sup> Street; 557-565 Lexington Avenue)

Block 1305, Lot 20

*Photograph: Sarah Moses, 2016*



Beverly Hotel  
East 50<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue bases  
*Photo: Marianne S. Percival, 2016*



Beverly Hotel, tower from south  
*Photo: Marianne S. Percival, 2016*



Beverly Hotel, window details  
*Photo: Gale Harris, 2012(top)*  
*Marianne S. Percival, 2016 (center, bottom)*



Beverly Hotel, west façade  
*Photo: Marianne S. Percival, 2016*



Beverly Hotel, window details west façade

*Photo: Marianne S. Percival, 2016*



Beverly Hotel, window details west façade  
*Photo: Marianne S. Percival, 2016*



Beverly Hotel window details west façade  
*Photo: Marianne S. Percival, 2016*



Beverly Hotel

*Photo: Marianne S. Percival, 2016*



Beverly Hotel, c. 1980s  
*Photo: Landmarks Preservation Commission*

# Beverly Hotel (now The Benjamin) | LP-2555

