

(Former) NEW YORK and NEW JERSEY TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH BUILDING, 81 Willoughby Street (aka 119-127 Lawrence Street), Brooklyn.
Built 1897-98; Rudolphe L. Daus, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 148, Lot 46.

On May 18, 2004, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the (former) New York and New Jersey Telephone and Telegraph Company Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were three speakers in favor of designation, including representatives of the Municipal Art Society, the Brooklyn Heights Association and the Historic Districts Council. The Commission also received a letter from Councilman David Yassky in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

Summary

Founded in 1883, the New York and New Jersey Telephone and Telegraph Company served the ever-increasing populations of Long Island, Staten Island and northern New Jersey. The fast growth of the city and the company created the need for a large headquarters building for this local service provider of the Bell system. This elaborate and elegantly designed Beaux-Arts style building served as a major statement of the company's expansion in the area, providing offices and telephone switching in the heart of Brooklyn's expanding business district. The company installed and maintained telephone wires and provided telephone service to more than 16,000 subscribers in 1897 when this building was constructed. Designed by leading Brooklyn architect Rudolphe L. Daus, the building's distinctive ornamentation establishes a strong presence on this busy street corner. Daus drew on his classical French training to create a dramatic structure, epitomized by the rounded corner accented by an elaborate cartouche and a deep, projecting cornice. These design features are balanced by oversized arches resting on engaged columns and broad rustication of the lower floors.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Expansion of the City of Brooklyn¹

The Village of Brooklyn (population 4,000) was incorporated in 1816 within the Town of Brooklyn, one of the original six towns that formed Kings County. The steam-powered ferry that ran between Manhattan and Brooklyn, begun in 1814, provided fast and reliable access for those who worked in Manhattan, and gave impetus to the development of some nearby Brooklyn residential neighborhoods, which were already growing in population. The early farms and estates in what is now Brooklyn Heights began to be subdivided for building lots, while local industry thrived along the waterfront.

With its population increasing and businesses flourishing, the City of Brooklyn incorporated in 1834. In an effort to bring some order to the rapidly growing city, in 1839 Brooklyn adopted its first city plan, incorporating a street grid. A civic center began to grow up around the new City Hall (begun 1836, completed 1849), at the intersection of Fulton, Joralemon and Court streets, which eventually included a court house, a Hall of Records, and the municipal building. Brooklyn's financial district, whose firms often did business with government agencies, established itself near the civic center, and included banks, insurance and title guarantee companies, as well as attorneys. As in other metropolitan centers, this area also housed cultural institutions and centers of entertainment. The city's population grew dramatically as the first waves of foreign-born immigrants began coming to Brooklyn in the 1840s and 50s, and the Towns of Williamsburg and Bushwick were merged into the City of Brooklyn. By the start of the Civil War, Brooklyn's population had reached almost 267,000 and it was the third largest city in the United States. Additional growth occurred after the Civil War, due to extensive immigration, the expansion of business in the entire New York area, and the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883. New cultural institutions such as the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Long Island Historical Society and the Brooklyn Public Library were reflective of the growth of the city. The outlying towns of Flatbush, Flatlands, New Utrecht, and Gravesend were expanding as well, with street grids beginning to be mapped for these areas in the 1870s (although they were not incorporated into the city of Brooklyn until 1886 and 1896). The city's population of 566,663 in 1880 surged to 1.1 million in 1900 (a figure which included these newly annexed areas) and the start of the borough's first rapid transit system in the 1890s made it easier for businesses to expand and for people to move around. The opening of the Brooklyn Bridge reoriented the commercial center from the waterfront toward Fulton Street, farther inland, near the civic center. The area around Willoughby and Lawrence Streets was in the path of this transition, as existing homes were torn down to make way for new and growing businesses.

This tremendous growth of residential as well as business activity provided a fertile market for the emerging telephone industry and the New York and New Jersey Telephone and Telegraph Company was ready to take on the challenge.

The New York and New Jersey Telephone Company²

After the first successful use of the telephone in 1875, Alexander Graham Bell received the patent for his invention in 1876, the same year it was introduced to the public at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. His Bell Telephone Company, founded in Massachusetts in 1877, operated by leasing the telephone equipment to its subscribers and erecting and maintaining the telephone wires. At the beginning, the company provided direct service from one point to another point among its local subscribers, but the limitations of this method quickly became clear. In 1878, the Bell Company developed the first switchboard exchange, enabling any user to be in contact with any other user of the same type of equipment, creating a much wider reach for telephone service. In the same year, the New England Company was founded as a subsidiary of the Bell Company, to construct, maintain and lease telephones, call bells and telephone lines in that part of the country. Several other small independent operators started their own local exchanges using leased equipment from the Bell Company and paying monthly fees to subscribe to their exchanges. As the system expanded, it became obvious that it would be more useful, economical, and prevent a duplication of effort, if everyone used the same exchanges. The Bell Company encouraged this process by licensing local exchanges and renting equipment, but leaving the ownership and management up to local operators. One of the first local exchanges to be established was the Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company in 1878, with a central switching office in Manhattan for 271 subscribers.³ By 1879, the National Bell Telephone Company was incorporated, with local exchanges as far south as Richmond, Virginia, and reaching to most cities and towns in the Mid-West. Bell subsidiary companies were gradually established throughout the United States to run telephone lines and maintain exchanges.

The New York and New Jersey Telephone Company was founded in 1883 as one of these subsidiary companies of the Bell Telephone system. Its areas of service were Long Island, Staten Island and the northern half of New Jersey. At its creation, the company counted 2,339 subscribers and was expanding rapidly. In 1895, its telephone lines reached to Patchogue, Long Island, and the company had purchased the right of way to Sag Harbor and Riverhead, on the island's eastern edge.⁴ By 1897, the number of subscribers had increased to more than 16,000, with 86 exchange stations and more than 21,000 miles of telephone wire.⁵

The New York and New Jersey Telephone Company was involved in all aspects of modernizing telephone service as its technology progressed. Beginning in 1884, the company started laying some of their wires underground, in "subways," a process that was formalized with the passage of a subway law in New York in 1885.⁶ Early in the twentieth century, the company began installing automated telephone exchanges in some of its offices, doing away with operators and establishing faster service.⁷ In 1909 the New York and New Jersey Telephone Company was one of six companies in the region, serving New York State, northern New Jersey and parts of Philadelphia, which were consolidated into the New York Telephone Company. Service to New Jersey was taken over by New Jersey Bell in 1927, a situation which continued until the divestiture of AT&T in 1984.⁸

Rudolphe Laurence Daus (1854-1916)⁹

Rudolphe Daus was born in Mexico, and educated in the United States, Berlin and Paris, where he studied at the Atelier Andre at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Recognized for his excellent work at the Ecole, Mr. Daus received the Achille LeClerc medal as well as several other honors. He returned to this country in 1879 and briefly entered the offices of Richard M. Hunt and George B. Post (two previous Beaux Arts graduates), before establishing his own practice in 1884, in the Garfield Building in downtown Brooklyn. Forced by ill health to retire at the age of 54, Daus spent his final years in Paris, where he died in 1916.

Daus's worked in a range of styles and types of buildings. He designed private residences in Manhattan (his 1901 house for J. Jaros on West End Avenue was cited as being the purest example of French Renaissance design in New York), Brooklyn (residence for Mr. Koechl on Montgomery Place, 1905), and Long Island (including his own vacation house in Arverne-by-the-Sea, built in 1900). Daus worked on numerous public buildings as well, including the façade and entrance hall of the 13th Regiment Armory in Brooklyn (1891), a remodeling and extension of the Kings County Hall of Records (1902-05, demolished), the Wyckoff Heights Hospital (1902, formerly the German Hospital), and the Lincoln Club (1896), all in Brooklyn. A confirmed Francophile, Rudolphe Daus was a member of the Society of Beaux Arts Architects, and president of the Brooklyn chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He held many civic positions, such as Surveyor of Buildings for Brooklyn in 1899-1900, as a member of a commission appointed in 1898 to consider building codes for the City of New York, and a member of the architects' committee for the Brooklyn Carnegie Libraries. Four of the Brooklyn Carnegie Libraries were designed by Daus, including the Flatbush, Greenpoint, Walt Whitman and Saratoga branches. He was prominent in Catholic circles and designed or remodeled several Catholic churches and related buildings, including Our Lady of Lourdes (1897), the Monastery of the Precious Blood (1895), and the St. John's Orphan Asylum (1901), all in Brooklyn. Daus' industrial and commercial buildings included those for the New York County National Bank, the National Lead Company and the American Can Company, and two buildings for the New York and New Jersey Telephone Company (in Brooklyn and Newark, NJ).

Upon his death, the Brooklyn Eagle called Rudolphe Daus, "One of the pioneers among Brooklyn architects."¹⁰ He was able to work in a variety of styles, from open and expansive Shingle style houses by the sea to dignified public buildings done in an appropriate Italian Renaissance revival style. He often used the Romanesque revival style for church related structures, as well as for his large and impressive armory building. Another critic at the time of his death wrote, "His work was always characterized by its dignity and strength, and none ever strove in a nobler way and held higher the standard of his profession."¹¹

The New York and New Jersey Telephone Company Building

The New York and New Jersey Telephone Company had its first offices on Fulton Street in downtown Brooklyn, later moving to Smith Street, before opening this large headquarters building on Willoughby Street in 1897.¹² In addition to office space, the building provided a large switching exchange for the many Brooklyn customers of the company, and was fitted with the latest fire proofing techniques and methods for cleaning the interior air. Since it was important for telephone service to work in a dust-free area, special care was taken to "bring the air from a shaft twenty-five feet above the roof, to the basement where it is screened through many layers of bolton cloth." A series of ducts and fans would

distribute the air through the building and then expel it above the roof. Extensive attention was given to fireproofing all telephone buildings during this period. The high cost of replacing the equipment lost to fire, as well as the loss of business to companies that had come to be reliant on telephone services made this a necessity.

Rudolphe Daus' elegant design for this large building at a corner location in downtown Brooklyn was intended to express the importance of this new type of enterprise for individuals and businesses, as well as to the city as a whole. The building is given prominence at this busy intersection by the deeply projecting cornice and the ornate embellishments to the oculus window near the top. Elaborate terra-cotta ornamentation can be found across both main facades, strategically placed to emphasize certain elements of the composition, as well as to identify the building's occupants. The contrast between the plain sections of stone or brick and the ornament makes the later stand out more strongly. This is especially true of the moldings and keystones of the large rounded arches and the elaborate oculus at the seventh story. The rustication of the lower floors and the elaborately ornamented upper stories is typical of French, Beaux-Arts style design, which the architect learned so well during the years of his study in Paris. The telephone-related motifs which frame the main entranceway on Willoughby Street add a whimsical touch.

Subsequent History

After the New York Telephone Company became the primary supplier of telephone service in the New York area, this building was formally conveyed to them in 1929.¹³ It has since been owned by a series of developers and is now used by a school and for medical offices.

Description

The New York and New Jersey Telephone Company Building occupies an almost square site at the corner of Willoughby and Lawrence Streets in downtown Brooklyn. Eight stories tall, it is faced with light tan brick, limestone and terra cotta and terminates in a broadly projecting copper cornice. The two street facades are almost identical, each having three bays, with an additional bay located at the rounded corner where the two sides join together. Most of the bays (except where there are building entrances) hold three, paired windows. The main entrance to the building is in the easternmost bay of the Willoughby Street façade, and the Lawrence Street façade has an altered service entrance on the ground floor of the central bay. All the windows have been changed to 1/1 double-hung aluminum sash. Stone cornices divide the building horizontally above the first, fourth and sixth stories.

There is an additional narrow service bay to the east of the building's main entrance on Willoughby Street, slightly recessed from the main plane of the building. The façade treatment of this additional section is very plain, with unadorned single window openings and plain brick facing, except for a continuation of the stone cornices above the first, fourth and sixth stories. A plain, non-historic service door is located at the ground floor of this section.

The ground story is faced with rusticated stone which has been given a cement coating. On Lawrence Street, the central bay has a metal stoop leading to a pair of replacement metal doors surrounded by cement infill. The rest of the ground story windows are partially covered by deep fabric awnings. The central window of the corner bay has been replaced by a glass door, reached by cement stairs with modern metal railings. The flanking windows have fixed, single-pane sash. The double-height, main entrance to the building is located in the eastern bay on Willoughby Street. It consists of a large, rounded, deeply-set archway which is framed by a full entablature. Its cornice is engraved with the words, "Telephone Company." The side piers, which support this cornice, are adorned with terra-cotta ornament in the form of early telephones with intertwined wires and ear pieces. Above each of the capitals of these piers is a spread-wing eagle perched on an embellished medallion. The rounded archway is fronted by moldings and a keystone with a head. Its reveal is coffered and it is supported by double columns with Corinthian capitals. Within the arch, the rectangular door opening is surrounded by a wide molding ornamented with emblems related to telephones, such as wires, early receivers and earpieces. A triangular pediment rises above the doorway, within the arch.

Stone cornices are located below the second and above the fourth stories, which are faced with brick laid to suggest rustication. Each bay has three paired windows with continuous stone sills, and lintels formed by flat brick arches. Above the fourth story, the wide stone cornice is punctuated by ornate terra-cotta medallions mounted between each bay. At the rounded corner bay, this cornice projects slightly and is carried on paired brackets. The fifth and sixth stories are linked by double-height, engaged columns set on stone bases. The center window of the fifth story is topped by a triangular pediment supported by smaller columns. Above the sixth story, another deep cornice rings the building, recessed slightly within

each bay and projecting between them. Each bay of the seventh story holds a large rounded arch with moldings and an elaborate terra cotta keystone. Tripartite window are set within each arch. The rounded corner bay at this level is pierced by a large oculus window enhanced by ornate terra-cotta ornament including a head, volutes and foliage. The original sash has been replaced by a fixed single-pane sash. At the top story, each bay has three paired, rectangular windows set between short brick pilasters, with no openings in the corner bay. A deep, projecting copper cornice enhanced by brackets and moldings creates a strong finishing element for the façade.

There is a narrow service bay located to the east of the main section of the building on Willoughby Street. It is set back slightly from the main plane of the building and has a narrow entrance at the ground story. Although the cornices continue as on the rest of the façade, the bay is generally unornamented, with a single window opening on each floor.

On the northern elevation, the wall which overlooks the short building to the north is faced by plain, unfenestrated brick. The other elevations are not visible from the street.

Report researched and written by
Virginia Kurshan
Research Department

NOTES

¹ Information about Brooklyn history comes from the following sources: "Brooklyn," in Kenneth Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 148-152; *New York City Guide* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970, reprint of 1939, Federal Writer's Publication), 431-454; Ellen Snyder-Grenier, *Brooklyn! An Illustrated History* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1996); and David Ment, *Building Blocks of Brooklyn* (New York, Brooklyn Education and Cultural Alliance, 1979).

² Robert W. Garnet, *The Telephone Enterprise, The Evolution of the Bell System's Horizontal Structure 1876-1901* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

³ "telephony," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, 1158.

⁴ "Latest Long Island News," *Brooklyn Eagle* (May 23, 1895), 7.

⁵ "A New Telephone Building," *The Brooklyn Eagle* (May 8, 1897), 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ "Automatic Telephones Now in Use in Queens," *Brooklyn Eagle* (July 13, 1902), 38.

⁸ "telephony," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, 1158-9.

⁹ Much of the information about Rudolphe L. Daus comes from his file at the New York Public Library, which includes obituaries from *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Oct. 16, 1916), *The New York Herald* (October 19, 1916), and *The New York Times* (Oct. 16, 1916), as well as a scrapbook of his work and a typescript of information from his daughter, Henriette Daus.

¹⁰ *Brooklyn Eagle*, (Oct. 16, 1916).

¹¹ From the Rudolphe L. Daus file at the New York Public Library.

¹² "A New Telephone Building," *Brooklyn Eagle* (May 8, 1897), 14.

¹³ Kings Country Register's Office, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 5046, pg. 325; August 2, 1929.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, architecture and other features of the building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the (Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone Company Building 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, among its important qualities, the (Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone Company Building is one of the most distinguished nineteenth century office buildings in downtown Brooklyn; that it was designed and constructed in 1897-98 by prominent Brooklyn architect Rudolphe L. Daus, who created numerous classically-inspired public and private buildings throughout the borough; that its Beaux Arts design, including localized areas of elaborate ornament is reflective of the architect's early training and interests; that the siting of this large and important building near the center of downtown Brooklyn was meant to show the ascendancy of telephone technology in general and this company in particular in the lives of many Brooklynites; that the New York and New Jersey Telephone company, founded in 1883 as a local subsidiary of the Bell System, was expanding rapidly in Brooklyn and all of Long Island and New Jersey, having grown from over 2,300 original subscribers to more than 16,000 subscribers when this building was constructed; that the broad, projecting cornice and ornate oculus window emphasize the building's important corner location; and that the finely laid masonry contrasts with beautiful terra-cotta details which highlight the composition as well as identify the purpose of the structure.

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 (Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone Company Building, 81 Willoughby Street (aka 119-127 Lawrence Street), Borough of Brooklyn, and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 148, Lot 46 as its Landmark Site.



(Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone and Telegraph Building
81 Willoughby Street (aka 119-127 Lawrence Street), Brooklyn
Photo: Carl Forster



Photo: Carl Forster

(Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone Building
Willoughby Street façade details



(Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone and Telegraph Building
Ornamental details near entrance



Photos: Carl Forster



(Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone and Telegraph Building
Ornamental Details

Photos: Carl Forster



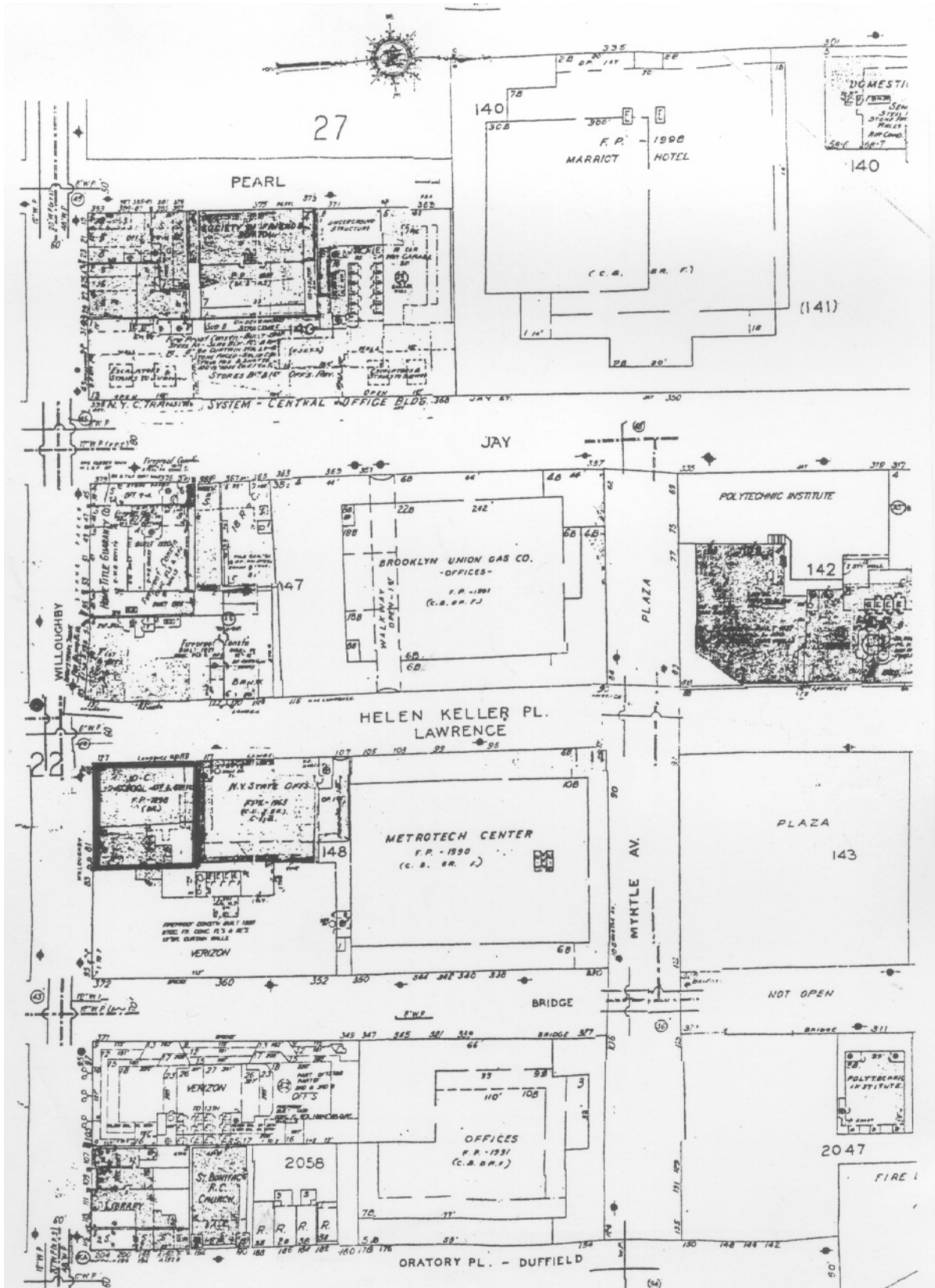
Willoughby Street Entrance



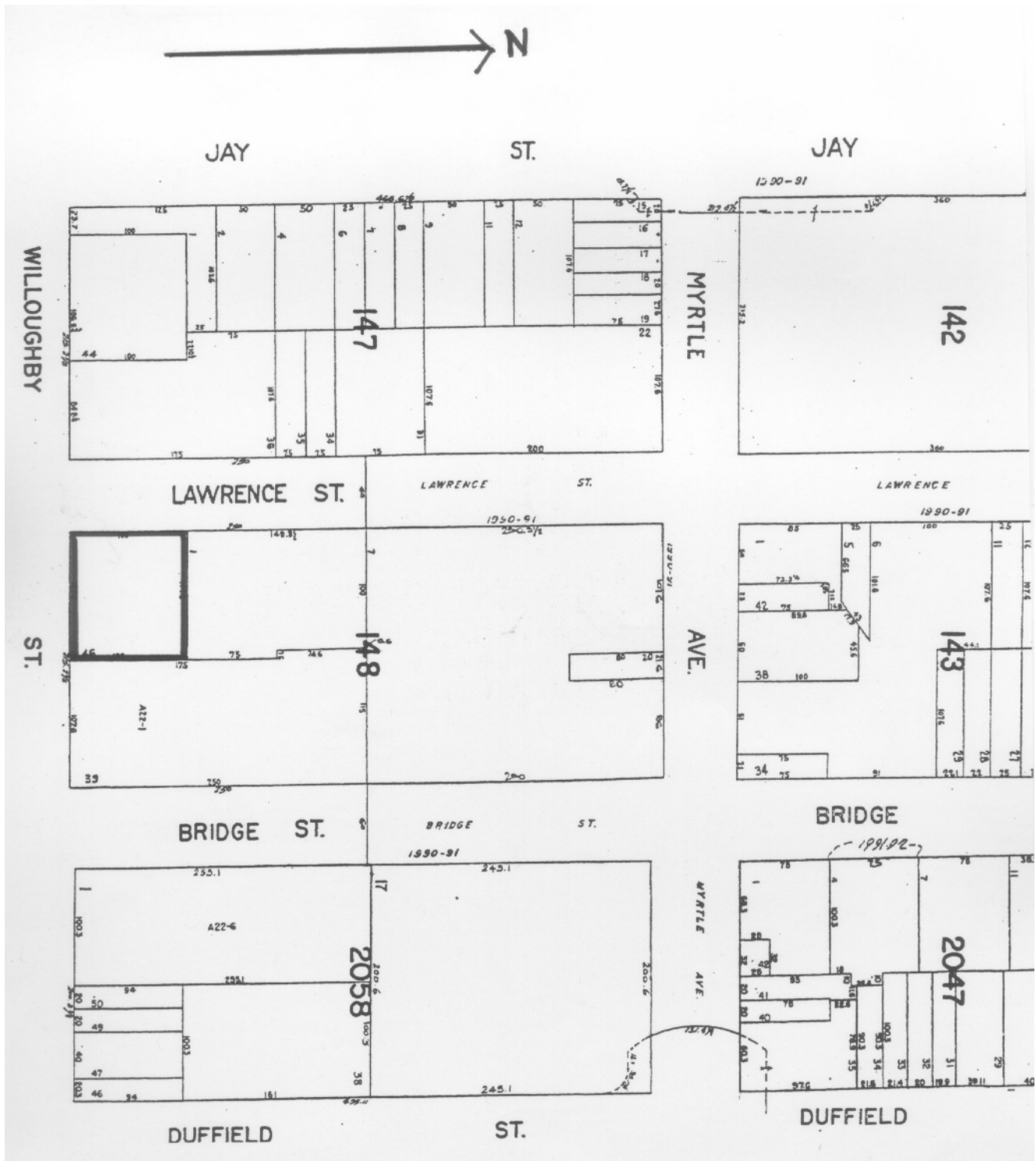
Details of upper stories

(Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone and Telegraph Building

Photos: Carl Forster



(Former) New York and New Jersey Telephone and Telegraph Building
 81 Willoughby Street (aka 119-127 Lawrence Street), Brooklyn
 Landmark Site: Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 148, Lot 46
 Source: Sanborn Build and Property Atlas: Brooklyn, NY, Region 1, Book 1, Volume 2, plate 28.



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