

**DELMONICO'S BUILDING**, 56 Beaver Street (aka 2-6 South William Street, and 56-58 Beaver Street), Manhattan. Built 1890-91, James Brown Lord, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 29, Lot 82 in part consisting of the portion of the lot occupied by the Delmonico's Building.

On Dec. 12, 1995, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Delmonico's Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 6). The hearing was continued to January 30, 1996 (Item No. 5). The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eight witnesses spoke in favor of the designation including representatives of Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger, Council Member Kathryn Freed, the Municipal Art Society, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Historic Districts Council, and New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. In addition, the Commission has received a resolution from Community Board 1 in support of the designation.

### Summary

Erected in 1890-91, to the designs of the prominent architect James Brown Lord, this striking Renaissance Revival restaurant and office building is the only surviving building associated with the world-famous Delmonico's Restaurant. Founded in 1827 by Swiss-born brothers, John and Peter Delmonico, Delmonico's was one of the first restaurants in the United States to specialize in fine Continental cuisine. When their restaurant burned in the Fire of 1835, the Delmonico brothers acquired this site, where they erected an elegant four-story building that quickly became a favorite gathering place for New York society and visiting dignitaries. In 1890 the Delmonicos replaced that building with the current eight-story building, which provided additional restaurant space as well as several office stories. Delmonico's was Lord's first major non-residential work and is a notable example of an architectural style for which he achieved renown. Praised by the New York Times as "admirable in its simplicity and elegance," the building is skillfully adapted to an irregular site. Faced in orange iron-spot brick, brownstone, and terracotta, the facade features giant arcades and a rounded corner bay which is distinguished by two tiers of giant columns and a semicircular entrance porch. The sensitive handling of materials, rich colors, and elaborate decorative program incorporating Renaissance motifs makes this one of the finest surviving late-nineteenth-century buildings in Manhattan's financial district.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Delmonico's Restaurant<sup>1</sup>

In 1827 two Swiss emigrants, the brothers John and Peter Delmonico, established a cafe serving cakes, ices, and fine wines at 23 William Street in the heart of Manhattan's downtown business district. The cafe quickly became a favorite with New York's European community. In 1831, the Delmonicos expanded their business, opening one of the first restaurants in the United States specializing in fine Continental cuisine at 25 William Street. New York Brahmin Abram C. Dayton remembered that:

*the courteous manner of the host, coupled with his delicious dishes and moderate charges, attracted the attention, tickled the palate, and suited the pockets of some of the Knickerbocker youths, who at once acknowledged the superiority of the French and Italian cuisine as expounded and set forth by Delmonico.... Gradually the little shop had not space to accommodate its increasing patronage.<sup>2</sup>*

In 1834, the Delmonicos established a second restaurant and small hotel at 76 Broad Street. When the William Street restaurant was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1835, which engulfed most of the Wall Street district, the Delmonicos immediately made plans to replace it with a much larger building at the intersection of Beaver, William, and South William (formerly Mill) Streets. Known popularly as the "Citadel" because of its distinctive rounded corner treatment, this Greek Revival brick building (built 1836-37) had decorative iron balconies and a marble entrance portico with four columns that were reputed to be from the doorway of a villa in Pompeii. The new building was located just a short walk from the new Stock Exchange and catered to an exclusive clientele that included the actor-theater owner James Wallack, merchant George Templeton Strong, journalist Richard Grant White, and such visiting dignitaries as Prince Louis Napoleon (the future Napoleon III). It also became a preferred setting for private entertainments, including balls and assemblies, and for small family dinners that took place in the restaurant's elegant private dining rooms.

After another fire destroyed the restaurant-hotel at 76 Broad Street, the Delmonicos opened a new hotel at 25 Broadway. Ten years later, the Delmonico family abandoned the hotel business and opened a restaurant in the exclusive Irving House Hotel at Broadway and Chambers Street. This was

the first of several leaps uptown that Delmonico's made as it followed fashionable society northward, opening restaurants in the former Grinnell mansion at Fifth Avenue and 14th Street (operated 1862-1876), in the Dodsworth Studio Building at Fifth Avenue and 26th Street (1876-1899), and finally in its own magnificent building at Fifth Avenue and 44th Street (1897-1923). In addition to these restaurants in residential areas, Delmonico's continued to serve the downtown business district, opening new restaurants at 22 Broad Street (1865-1893) a few doors from the Stock Exchange, at 112-114 Broadway (1876-1886) adjoining the original Equitable Building, and at 341 Broadway (1886-91), in the dry goods district. During the 1870s and 1880s, the Beaver Street "Citadel" continued to cater to bankers, shipping merchants, and brokers.

By 1889 Delmonico's was the leading restaurant in the city and one of the most famous in the country. Credited with transforming American eating habits, its kitchens were overseen by the great chef Charles Ranhofer, who had created such renowned dishes as Baked Alaska and Lobster Newberg. Its various branches had hosted every president since Monroe and the Delmonico's had lost count of the notables who had been served in their restaurant. As the New York *Sun* observed, the Delmonico family had given New Yorkers "places not merely to dine at, but to talk about, to take foreigners to, places to be proud of, places which make the city attractive the world over."<sup>3</sup> Charles Crist Delmonico, a grand-nephew of the original founders who had taken control of the business in 1884, was anticipating future growth. He acquired two properties at 4 and 6 South William Street, adjacent to the "Citadel," with the idea of replacing that building with a new restaurant and office building.

The downtown office district was then undergoing a building boom. In the immediate vicinity of Delmonico's, two large buildings had gone up in the 1880s,<sup>4</sup> the seven-story Cotton Exchange (built 1883-1885, demolished) at the junction of Beaver Street, William Street, and Hanover Square, and the eight-story Post Building (built 1880-81, demolished) at the intersection of Hanover Square, Exchange Place, and Broad Street, which had brought considerable business to the area. The Coffee Exchange had also purchased the property adjacent to the Cotton Exchange at 115-119 Pearl Street, and the

Farmers Loan & Trust Company had acquired several lots at Beaver and William Streets, and both had announced their plans to erect new buildings. Moreover, the Produce Exchange (built 1881-84) at Beaver Street and Bowling Green and the New York Stock Exchange at Broad Street near Wall Street were only two short blocks away. With additional restaurant space to accommodate the increasing number of potential customers in the area and several floors of rental space to take advantage of the growing office market, the new Delmonico's building was destined for success.

#### James Brown Lord<sup>5</sup>

The architect selected to design the new building, James Brown Lord (1859-1902) was a native New Yorker from a socially prominent family. After graduating from Princeton in 1879, Lord joined the architectural firm of William A. Potter. While with Potter's firm, he assisted in the design of the Union Theological Seminary (1883) at Park Avenue and East 70th Street (no longer standing). In 1883 Lord began receiving commissions for private houses, which were built in New York City, Yonkers, Tuxedo Park, Roslyn, Long Island, and Bar Harbor, Maine. In 1890 Lord joined with Stanford White and Bruce Price to design the King Model Houses on West 138th and West 139th Streets between Seventh and Eighth Avenues (now included in the St. Nicholas Historic District).

In 1886 Charles Delmonico commissioned Lord to design a new branch for the restaurant in the basement and first two stories of a small office building at 341 Broadway. Though the location proved to be unpopular and the restaurant lasted for only a few years, Lord's renovation won praise from the *Real Estate Record & Guide* for his skillful planning and tasteful decorations.<sup>6</sup> Four years later Lord was given the commission for the Delmonico Building at Beaver and William Street, his first major non-residential work. In 1896 Charles C. Delmonico had Lord design a new restaurant and banqueting hall at Fifth Avenue and East 44th Street which was to be the largest and grandest of all his family's establishments. In addition to these commissions, Lord designed several hospitals, including St. Luke's, as well as the Society of New York Hospital (Bloomingdale Asylum) at White Plains, New York (1894), and the New York Infant Asylum at Amsterdam Avenue and West 61st Street (1901). The Bloomingdale branch of the New York Free Circulating Library (1898), the Yorkville Branch Library (1902), and Lord's most prominent work, the

Appellate Division Courthouse on Madison Square (1896-99), all three designated New York City Landmarks, were executed in the Renaissance-inspired style he favored in the late 1890s. His successful career ended prematurely when he died in 1902 at the age of 43.

#### "A New Delmonico's"<sup>7</sup>

Charles C. Delmonico laid the cornerstone for the new Delmonico's Building on July 10, 1890; one year later, on July 7, 1891, the new building opened to the public. Built at a cost of \$360,000, the eight-story, cast-iron-and-steel-framed building contained a first floor cafe and restaurant (admired as one of the handsomest in the city), second-floor dining rooms for ladies and private parties, a eighth-floor kitchen, and rental offices on the remaining floors.<sup>8</sup> Praised by the *New York Times* as "admirable in its simplicity and elegance,"<sup>9</sup> the building's exterior design is an excellent example of the Renaissance Revival style. The building is designed according to the tripartite system of articulation (just then coming into fashion), with the stories grouped into a base, mid-section, and attic, separated by prominent cornices. Because of the irregularities in the site, Lord treated the corner as a separate front which is flanked on either side by facades featuring giant arcades. Greatest emphasis is given to the three-bay-wide rounded corner facade which is articulated with giant columns and a semi-circular entrance porch topped by a balustrade. The doorway surround incorporates a section of marble cornice apparently salvaged from the crowning cornice of the 1835 building and two of the "Pompeiiian" columns from the portico of the 1835 building. (These had come to be regarded as talismans which patrons touched in passing for good luck.) The design is also notable for its striking use of color, combining orange iron-spot brick with a brownstone, known as "Belleville rock," and terra cotta. Noteworthy features of the rich decorative program include the use of such Renaissance motifs as foliate relief panels, volutes, arabesqued pilasters, swagged friezes, balustrades, and oculus windows. The extensive terra-cotta work includes unusual "rusticated" quoins surrounding the giant arches.

#### Later History

In 1893, this building became Delmonico's sole downtown quarters when the building housing its Broad Street restaurant was sold to a developer.<sup>10</sup> Charles Crist Delmonico died in 1901, but the business continued under the management of his aunt, Rosa Crist Delmonico. Following Rosa

Delmonico's death in 1904, control of the restaurant passed to Charles's sister, Josephine Crist Delmonico. By the 1910s mounting expenses and management problems began to take a toll on profitability, creating a rift between Josephine Delmonico and the other members of her family who were minority stockholders in the restaurant. This situation worsened considerably during World War I as disruptions in the shipping industry led to soaring prices and food shortages. The war had also created an enormous demand for downtown office space as maritime shipping companies and associated businesses began to enjoy unprecedented profits with which to expand; in August 1917 the Delmonico family agreed to sell the Beaver Street building to the American Merchant Marine Insurance Company for \$500,000. Initially the Delmonico family planned to continue leasing the restaurant portion of the building, but in November 1917, shortly after the wartime rationing board called on hotels and restaurants to institute "meatless" and "wheatless" days, Delmonico's ceased operations on Beaver Street. Josephine Delmonico continued to operate the uptown restaurant until 1919, when the business was sold. It closed in 1923, a victim of Prohibition and rising real estate values in the Grand Central district. In 1925, George S. Chappell's guide to the restaurants of New York lamented the closing of Delmonico's "fine restaurant" on Beaver Street, saying that "the lower city knows no such excellence now except in some of its princely luncheon clubs."<sup>11</sup>

When the downtown restaurant closed, the lower floors of the Delmonico building were partitioned for office use.<sup>12</sup> Known as Merchant Marine House, the building became the home of a number of marine insurance companies and shipping businesses. In 1920, the building was sold to the Insurance Company of North America for \$1,250,000, realizing the "the largest profit for the owners that had been made on any real estate 'turn' in the neighborhood."<sup>13</sup> In 1934, restaurateur Oscar Tucci established Oscar's Oldelmonico Restaurant (later Delmonico's Restaurant) in the basement and first floor. Operating along the lines of the original Delmonico's Restaurant and catering to a business clientele, the restaurant quickly became a success, expanding to the building's second floor in 1935 and to the first floor of the adjacent four-story building at 48-54 Beaver Street in 1943 (both buildings having been acquired by the City Bank Farmers Trust Company).<sup>14</sup> In 1985 a group of investors under the name of 56 Beaver-Wall Street Inc. acquired the Delmonico's Building and 48-54 Beaver Street. Presumably, it was at that

time that the buildings underwent a number of modifications including the replacement of the original window sash with one-over-one anodized aluminum windows. In 1994 the MBC Assurance Corporation acquired the building through foreclosure; although Delmonico's Restaurant has ceased operations and the first floor is currently vacant, a variety of commercial concerns occupy the upper floors. In November 1995 the building was purchased by Time Equities, Inc.

#### Description

Delmonico's is located on an irregular lot which extends fifty-five feet along Beaver Street and 126 feet along South William Street bending along South William Street and tapering to an acute angle at the junction of Beaver and South William Streets. The building conforms to this irregularly shaped site and has a rounded corner at the intersection of Beaver and South William Streets. Constructed with an internal skeleton of iron and steel, the building is faced with brownstone, orange iron-spot Roman brick, and terra cotta. Its Renaissance Revival design features a tripartite arrangement of stories, with prominent cornices establishing the divisions between the two-story base, five-story mid-section, and one-story attic. On Beaver and William Streets the mid-sections are articulated with giant arcades which focus attention on the three-bay-wide trabeated facade at the intersection of the two streets. On Beaver Street the facade is divided into a single bay (at the northeast corner of the facade) and two wider bays which contain paired windows at lower and upper floors and triple windows in the large arches. On South William Street the facade is divided into two sections: the projecting corner pavilion at the southwest corner of the facade, which is articulated with two bays containing paired windows, and a longer section in which single bays frame three wide arched bays. This clever solution creates the impression of a balanced, symmetrical design when the building is viewed from the intersection of Beaver and William Streets, while providing appropriate treatments for the facades on Beaver Street and South William Street with their varying proportions and functions. The original windows were replaced with one-over-one anodized aluminum windows in the mid-1980s. (The interior of the building is not included in this landmark designation.)

Base The first and second story are faced with a light brownstone known as "Belleville rock" above a foundation of brick and granite which has been

covered with sandstone. The walls are pierced by large rectangular window openings which have simple molded surrounds.

**Main Restaurant Entrance** At the corner of Beaver Street and South William Street the main entrance to the restaurant is marked by a rounded portico of Corinthian columns, which has a broad frieze embellished with the word "DELMONICO'S," and a prominent balustrade. Flanking the doorway are two columns, salvaged from the 1835 Delmonico's building on this site, which are reputedly ancient artifacts brought to New York from Pompeii by John Delmonico. The marble cornice above the door may have also been salvaged from the earlier building, perhaps from its crowning cornice. The doorway has historic paneled wood reveals edged with an egg and dart molding. Historic paired paneled wood doors are fitted with Aesthetic Period handles and etched glass lights. The historic wood transom also has a single etched glass light.

**Office Entrance** On Beaver Street the classical orders framing the office entrance bay have been simplified and the wall has been stuccoed; however the stucco has been removed from the arched opening which has splayed stone jambs decorated with boldly modeled classical moldings. The stoop in front of the doorway has been faced with pink granite which matches the granite walls around the planter to the west of the entry. The historic infill and doors in this entrance have been replaced with plate glass elements. Above the doorway, volute-shaped relief panels frame a pair of windows which are capped by a broad frieze embellished with a recently installed metal plaque labeled, "56 Beaver Street."

**Secondary Dining Room Entrance** On South William Street, the secondary dining room entrance is approached by a brownstone stoop; its cheek walls support decorative wrought-iron railings and posts which appear to be original. The doorway's carved stone surround is richly ornamented with Renaissance motifs. Although the door has been replaced, the entry still has its original paneled wood reveals. The transom above the door is supported by a brownstone transom bar and retains its original wood surround; the window has been replaced by louvered infill. At the southwest corner of the South William Street facade, two window bays were modified to create doorways in the 1980s. The lamp

posts flanking the corner and South William Street restaurant entrances and the lamps flanking the office entrance on Beaver Street probably date from the early twentieth century, but they were not installed at this building until after 1940. The striped awnings at the first story windows and balloon awning above the Beaver Street entrance date from the 1980s. Historic photographs show that originally retractable awnings were placed at many of the windows.

Midsection The brick midsection of the building is trimmed in brownstone and terra cotta. Two-story engaged brownstone colonnades articulate the curved corner which is also decorated with foliated spandrel panels. The brick side walls are articulated with tall arches set off by quoins composed of terra-cotta panels enriched with a checkerboard relief pattern that creates a "rusticated" effect. Foliated terra-cotta panels decorate the length of the seventh story except at the corner bay which is faced with brownstone relief panels decorated with arabesques. The seventh story is crowned by a strongly projecting modillioned cornice (a section of the cornice on the southeastern corner of the South William Street facade has been removed).

Upper Section The brick eighth-story attic is articulated with slender pilasters which are richly ornamented with arabesques. The pilasters support a modest terminal cornice. The balustrade which once edged the roofline has been removed. Original brick chimneys are visible at the west corner of the Beaver Street facade and the east corner of the South William Street facade. In addition, a brick penthouse has recently been reconstructed on the west end of the building near Beaver Street.

Rear Walls Portions of the building's original courtyard walls are visible above 48-54 Beaver Street when the buildings are viewed from the north side of Beaver Street. (48-54 Beaver Street is not included in this designation.) These walls are faced with common red brick and are pierced by square window openings which contain paired one-over-one anodized aluminum windows. The west wall has been painted and retains traces of a very faded advertising mural. The upper portion of this wall has been rebuilt.

Report prepared by  
Gale Harris, Research Department

NOTES

1. This section on the history of Delmonico's is based on Lately Thomas (pseud.) *Delmonico's: A Century of Splendor* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967); Robert Shaplen, "Delmonico," *New Yorker*, Nov. 10 and 17, 1956; Henry Collins Brown, *Delmonico's: A Story of Old New York* (New York: Valentine's Manual, 1928); "Delmonico Family" Vertical File, and "New York City Restaurants" Vertical File, Local History and Genealogy Division, General Research Division, New York Public Library.
2. Quoted in Thomas, 17.
3. "Delmonico's Famous Line," *New York Sun*, Sept. 29, 1901.
4. This section on the development of the area around Beaver and South William Streets is based on "Important Buildings Under Way," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, May 25, 1889, 728-729; "Five Months of Real Estate Transactions and New Buildings," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, June 8, 1889, 702; *A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York City* (1898; rpt., New York: Arno Press, 1967), 118-120.
5. This biography of James Brown Lord is adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, First Department Interior Designation Report*, prepared by Marjorie Pearson (LP-1133), (New York: City of New York, 1981); LPC, *New York Free Circulating Library Designation Report*, prepared by Betsy Bradley (LP-1616), (New York: City of New York, 1989), 2-3. See also James Brown Lord obituaries, *New York Times*, June 2, 1902, p. 2; and American Institute of Architects, *Quarterly Bulletin*, 3-4 (1902-03), 71.
6. "The New Down-town Delmonico's," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, July 17, 1886, p. 916.
7. For a contemporary description of the new Delmonico's building see "A New Delmonico's," *New York Times*, May 18, 1890, 13. See also Thomas, 227-228. The building was illustrated soon after its opening in the *American Architect and Building News* 42 (Nov. 25, 1893), 103; and *King's Handbook of New York City* (Boston: Moses King, 1893), 239.
8. The cellar contained dressing rooms for the waiters, an extensive wine cellar, elevator pumps, and a dynamo to power the building's "brilliant electric lights" which were reflected in its "many mirrors." See "A New Delmonico's," 13.
9. *Ibid.*
10. The information in this paragraph is taken from Thomas, *passim*; Shaplen, 135-137; "100,000 Food Houses Now Under License," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1917, p. 13; "City in Now Facing a Shortage of Flour," *NYT*, Nov. 3, 1917, p. 19; "Calls on Hotel Men to Save More Food," *NYT*, Nov. 6, 1917, p. 13; "Latest Dealings in the Realty Field," unidentified clipping dated Aug. 19, 1917, in the New York Public Library, "Delmonico Family," Vertical File.
11. George S. Chappell, *The Restaurants of New York* (New York: Greenberg, 1925).
12. This section on the later history of the Delmonico's Building is based on New York Telephone Directory, *Manhattan Address Directory* (New York: 1929, 1935, 1940, 1950); New York City Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Alt. 233-1918, Alt. 1022-1918, Alt. 3139-1934, Alt. 2314-1935, PA. 877-1943, Alt. 1488-1944, Alt. 1549-1955, Alt. 253-1959; New York Public Library, *Photographic Views of New York City, 1870s-1970s* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1981), fiche 991, A2; Oscar Tucci obituary, *NYT*, June 7, 1969, 35.
13. *Photographic Views of New York City, 1870s-1970s*, fiche 991, A2.
14. In 1955, Oscar's Olddelmonico began leasing the second floor of the building at 48-54 Beaver Street. At that time a number of changes were made to link the buildings internally. (Nos. 48-54 Beaver Street are not part of this designation).

## 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 Delmonico's Building has a special character, and 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 Delmonico's Building, erected in 1890-91, is the only surviving building associated with the world-famous Delmonico's Restaurant; that this striking Renaissance Revival building designed by the prominent architect James Brown Lord is one of the finest surviving late-nineteenth-century buildings in Manhattan's financial district; that Delmonico's, founded in 1827 by brothers John and Peter Delmonico, was one of the first restaurants in the United States to specialize in fine Continental cuisine; that Delmonico's has occupied this site since 1835 when the Delmonico brothers erected an elegant four-story restaurant building that quickly became a favorite gathering place for New York society and visiting dignitaries; that the Delmonicos replaced that building with the current eight-story building which provided additional restaurant space as well as several office stories to take advantage of the booming market for office space in the area; that Delmonico's was Lord's first major non-residential building and is a notable example of an architectural style for which he was renowned; that Lord's design is skillfully adapted to an irregular site and is notable for its sensitive handling of materials, rich colors, and elaborate decorative program of Renaissance motifs.

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 Delmonico's Building, 56 Beaver Street (aka 2-6 South William Street, and 56-58 Beaver Street), Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 29, Lot 82 in part consisting of the portion of the lot occupied by the Delmonico's Building.



Delmonico's Building  
56 Beaver Street  
(aka 2-6 South William Street and 56-58 Beaver Street)  
Manhattan  
Photo: Carl Forster





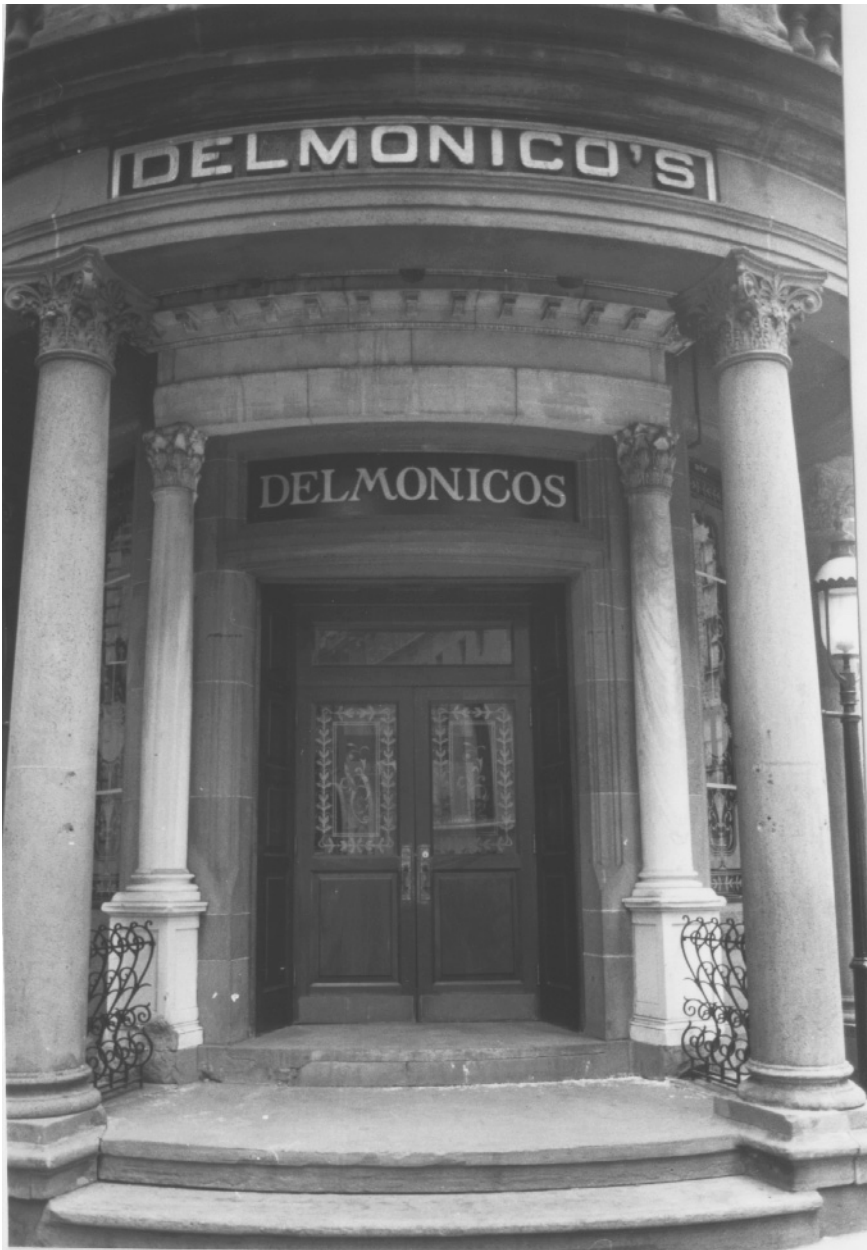
Delmonico's Building  
South William Street facade  
Photo: Carl Forster



Delmonico's Building  
Details of the South William Street facade  
Photos: Carl Forster



Delmonico's Building  
Ornamental details on the Upper stories of the rounded corner facade  
Photos: Carl Forster



Delmonico's Building  
Details of the Restaurant and Beaver Street office entrances  
Photos: Carl Forster



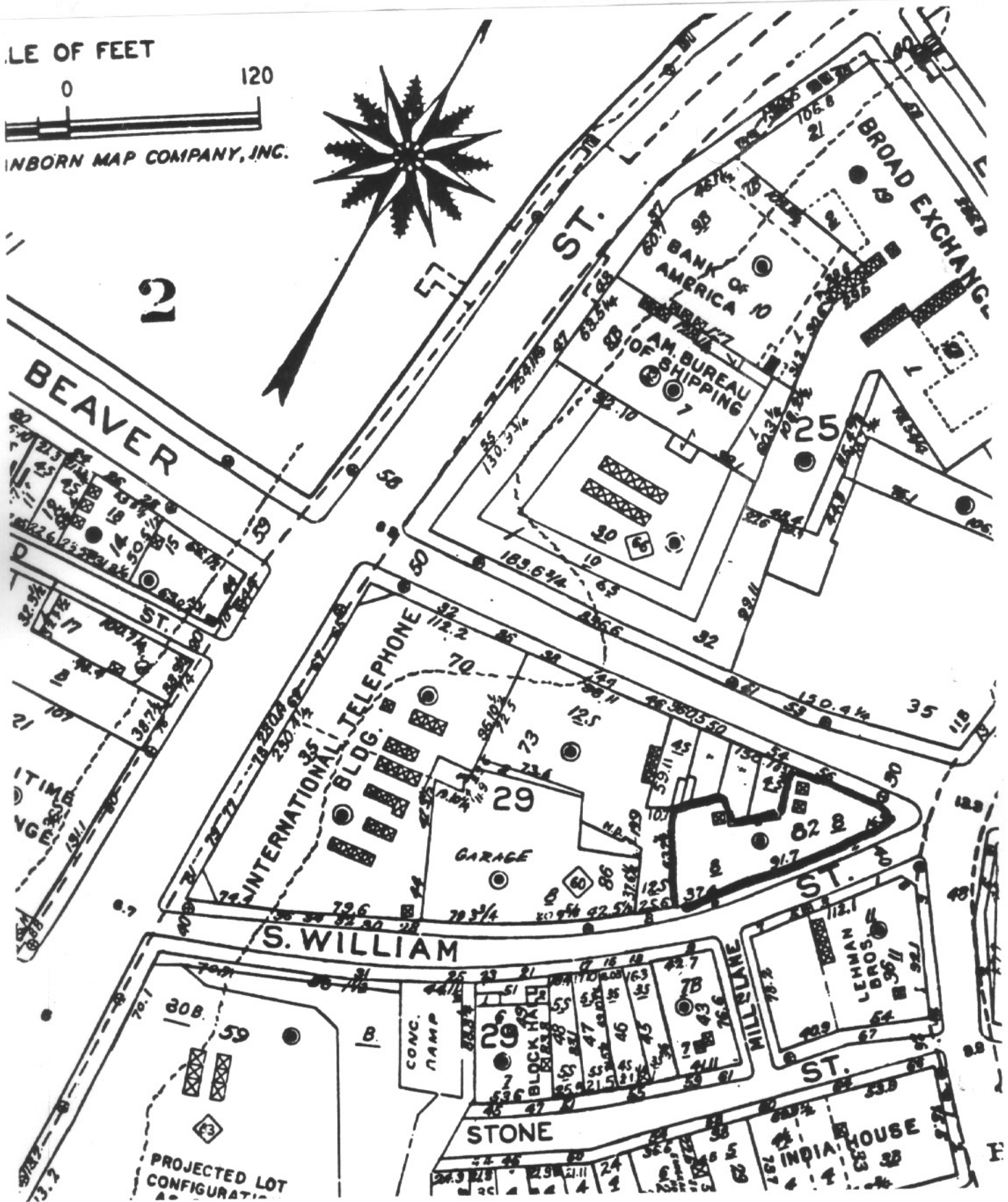


Delmonico's Building  
Details of the upper stories on Beaver Street  
Photos: Carl Forster

SCALE OF FEET



SANBORN MAP COMPANY, INC.



Delmonico's Building

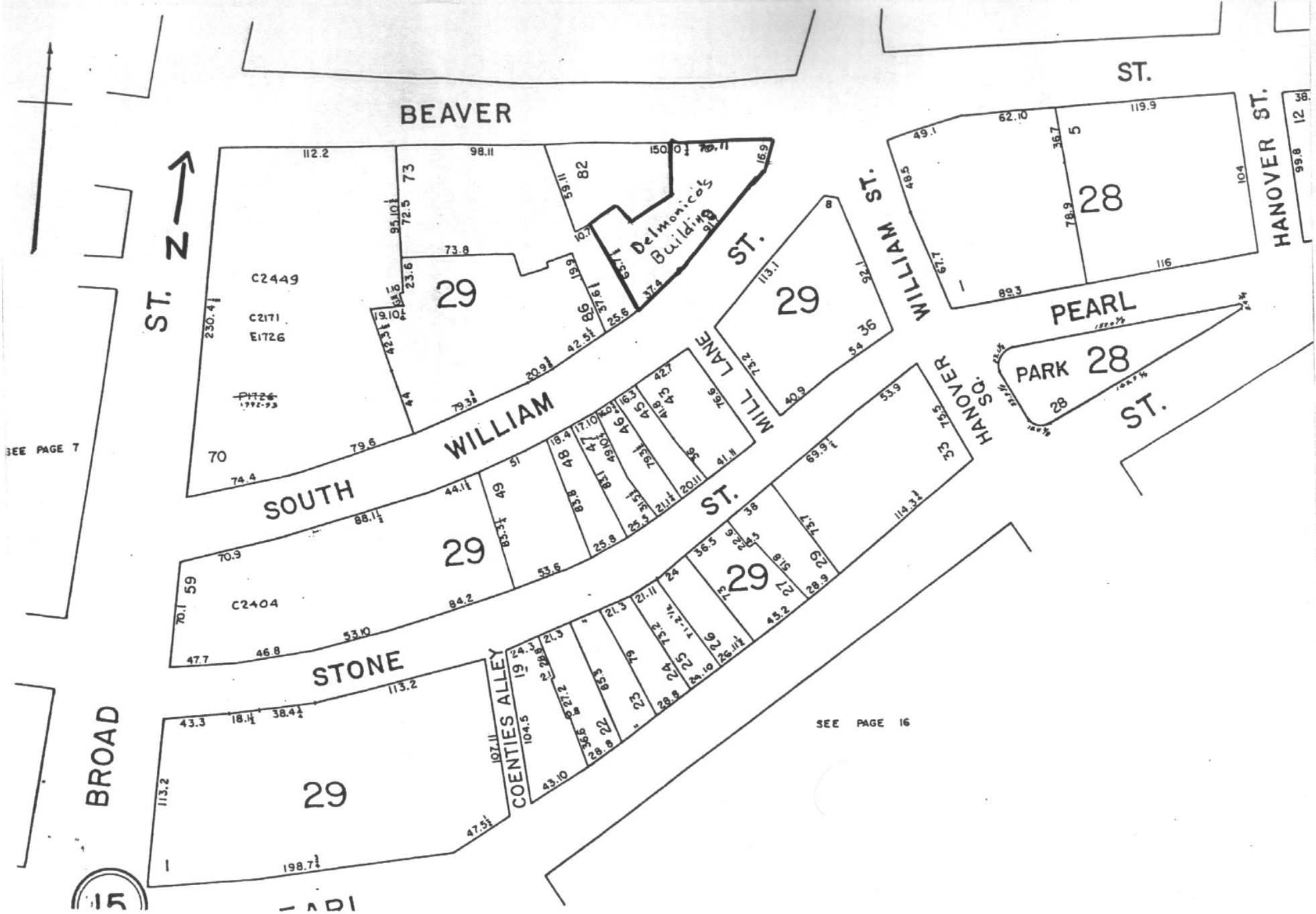
56 Beaver Street

(aka 2-6 South William Street and 56-58 Beaver Street)

Manhattan

Landmark Site: Manhattan Tax Map Bl. 29, Lot 82 in part

Source: Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1994-95



Delmonico's Building, 56 Beaver Street (aka 2-6- South William Street and 56-58 Beaver Street) Manhattan, Tax Map Block 29, Lot 82  
 The Landmark Site consisting of the portion of the lot occupied by the Delmonico's Building  
 Source: New York City Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map