Landmarks Preservation Commission
July 16, 2002, Designation List 338
LP-2119

TIME & LIFE BUILDING, ground floor interior, consisting of the West 50th Street entrances and enclosed breezeway leading to the West 51st Street entrance, the lobby and elevator halls, incorporating the east, west, south and north corridors, as well as the escalators adjacent to the north corridor descending to the lower concourse and rising to the second story; the stairs descending to the lower concourse, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, works of art, signs, entrance doors, elevator doors, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, and lighting fixtures; 1261-1277 Sixth Avenue (aka 101-133 West 50th Street and 100-130 West 51st Street), Manhattan. Built 1956-60; Harrison & Abramowitz & Harris, architects.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1003, Lot 29.

On June 18, 2002, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the ground floor interior of the Time & Life Building (Item No. 1). The hearing was duly advertised according to provision of law. Fourteen witnesses, including a representative of the owner, the Rockefeller Group, and the lessee, Time, Inc., as well as representatives of City Council Member Christine C. Quinn, State Senator Thomas K. Duane, Assemblyman Richard N. Gottfried, the Municipal Art Society, DoCoMoMo Tri-State, Modern Architecture Working Group, New York Landmarks Conservancy, and Historic Districts Council, spoke in support of designation. There were no speakers opposed to designation. At the designation hearing, a representative of Time, Inc. restated the lessee's support for designation.

Summary

The ground floor lobby of the Time & Life Building is one of the most striking interiors in New York City. Located on Sixth Avenue, between 50th and 51st Streets, the forty-eight-story skyscraper was designed by Michael M. Harris, of Harrison & Abramowitz & Harris. Constructed in 1956-60 as a joint venture of Time, Inc. and Rockefeller Center, it was the first building in the Rockefeller Center complex to be located on the west side of Sixth Avenue. Whereas most buildings in the Center are entered on axis, the Time & Life Building is entered from the cross streets, through revolving doors, and on 51st Street, by a covered breezeway. An eclectic decorative scheme animates the entire lobby, including the floor, walls, and ceiling. Whereas plate glass and white marble cover the outer walls, the elevator core is wrapped in shimmering stainless steel panels which contrast and complement the gray and white terrazzo floor laid in a playful serpentine pattern. Abstract works by noted artists Fritz Glarner and Josef Albers are located near the 50th Street entrances. In the north corridor are escalators and stairs to provide access to the lower concourse and subway, as well as the second story. Inspired by the planning principles pioneered in Rockefeller Center during the 1930s and the mainstream acceptance of the International Style after the Second World War, the lobby's design is notable for its lively decorative character and as a rare, intact, example of mid-century modernism.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS[1]

The lobby of the Time & Life Building is one of the most unusual and best-preserved modern interiors in New York City. As the main tenant and co-owner, Time, Inc. encouraged the prominent architects Harrison & Abramowitz & Harris to create a lobby that would be both distinctive and contemporary. In the 1950s and 1960s, Time was the largest publisher of magazines in the United States and the new skyscraper housed the editorial offices of *Time, Life, Time/Life International, Sports Illustrated, Fortune, House & Home,* and *Architectural Forum*. In contrast to the minimalism highlighted by many historians of twentieth-century architecture, the lobby is notable for its lively and colorful decorative scheme. While the exterior was designed to complement the earlier buildings in Rockefeller Center, the handsomely-decorated lobby was intended to express the publisher's up-to-date and international character.

Development of the Elevator Lobby

Prior to the introduction of the passenger elevator, the first-story interiors of most office buildings were similar to the floors above, featuring stairs, hallways, and offices. In subsequent decades, elevators transformed the way buildings were planned; not only did they make the upper stories more accessible and valuable, but the installation of such devices required that the adjoining spaces, especially on the lowest floor, be configured so that tenants and visitors could gather to wait for the next car.

As office buildings grew, so did the number of elevators. When one of the city's earliest skyscrapers, the Equitable Life Assurance Society Building (1868-70, Gilman & Kendall, demolished) was enlarged in 1886-87, the ground story was significantly altered. To serve the increased number of people entering and leaving the building each day, an impressive lobby was created, featuring a "grand court" flanked by four pairs of elevators and a handsome staircase leading to the second story. Inspired by commercial arcades in Paris and other European cities, it provided tenants with a range of services, from post office boxes and stock tickers to a newsstand, restaurant and barber shop. The richly-decorated passage featured an impressive stained-glass vault, as well as a large mosaic, commissioned from Herter Brothers, one of the era's most celebrated decorators.[2]

Over the next two decades, architects experimented with various floor plans. While the elevators in the Equitable Building were located to either side of the main corridor, on narrower plots they were frequently arranged in a single row, and in some cases, such as in the New York Life Insurance Building (Stephen D. Hatch and McKim, Mead & White, 1894-96, a designated New York City Landmark and Interior) and the Park Row Building (R.H. Robertson, 1896-99, a designated New York City Landmark), semi-circular elevator halls were created, located near the center of the lobby. The later example, for a time the world's tallest building, was praised in the *Engineering News* for "providing rapid and safe transit to and from the various floors of [the] building containing some 950 offices, accommodating over 4,000 people, and with a stream of people constantly passing in and out amounting very likely to 20,000 or more each day."[3]

Lobbies became increasingly important statements about skyscrapers and their tenants in the early twentieth century. Whether designed for the owner, or as a speculative venture, these public spaces helped define a building's identity. The Woolworth Building (Cass Gilbert, 1910-13, a designated New York City Landmark and Interior), for instance, was one of the period's most significant examples. Cruciform in plan, the lobby has twenty-four passenger elevators, as well as staircases leading to the mezzanine and lower levels. Works of art are located throughout the lobby, including whimsical gargoyles, a glass ceiling above the central stairs inscribed with the names of great commercial nations, and a pair of allegorical murals by Paul Jennewein portraying Commerce and Labor. Along the outer walls of the ground floor were retail stores and restaurants, accessible from both the street and lobby.

After World War I, this trend continued, culminating in such memorable office towers as the Chanin Building (Irwin S. Chanin, with Sloan & Robertson, 1927-29, a designated New York City Landmark) and the Chrysler Building (William van Allen, 1928-30, a designated New York City Landmark and Interior). Both decorative and functional, these richly-embellished lobbies provide tenants and visitors with a memorable place of entry. In addition to providing retail space and a waiting area for passengers, the lower floors incorporated links to public transit. This type of amenity was probably introduced during the 1890s. The first story of the Empire Building (Kimball & Thompson, 1895-98, a designated New York City Landmark), for instance, was connected to the elevated railway on Trinity Place, and when the IRT subway was introduced in 1904, such skyscrapers as the Times Building (Eidlitz & McKenzie, 1903-5, significantly altered) and the Municipal Building (McKim, Mead & White, 1907-

14, a designated New York City Landmark) were planned to provide direct access to the recently-completed transit system.

The Architects and Rockefeller Center[4]

Construction of Rockefeller Center began in 1931. Featuring a mix of low and high-rise office buildings, landscaped plazas, and a subterranean concourse leading to the IND subway station, the complex is notable for integrating art, architecture, and modern urban planning. Among the various architects who collaborated on the early stages of design and construction was Wallace K. Harrison (1895-1981). Following relatively brief associations with McKim, Mead & White and Bertram G. Goodhue, in 1927 he joined Corbett, Helme and MacMurray, an architectural firm specializing in the design of high-rise structures. Beginning in 1929, they worked with the Associated Architects on the design and construction of Rockefeller Center, collaborating with Hood, Godley & Fouilhoux, and Reinhard & Hofmeister. Following completion of the first phase of construction in 1935, Harrison became partners with Jacques Andre Fouilhoux (1879-1945). They worked on two buildings in Rockefeller Center, as well as the Rockefeller Apartments (1935-37, a designated New York City Landmark). In later years, Harrison's most significant associate was Max Abramowitz.[5] Born in 1908, he moved to New York City in 1931, joining Harrison & Fouilhoux in 1938. He became a full partner in 1941, and following Fouilhoux's death, the firm was renamed Harrison & Abramowitz.

Harrison played a central role in developing the firm's character and reputation. As director of planning for the United Nations headquarters (1947-52), he demonstrated that he could supervise monumental projects while balancing the interests of rival parties. His involvement in this high-profile complex made him internationally famous; a 1954 profile in the *New Yorker* magazine described Harrison as the "most influential practitioner of his generation."[6] While Harrison is likely to have had the final say in most decisions, the firm's projects were collaborative efforts, reflecting the talents and concerns of various staff members. The architect George Dudley recalled:

> Harrison most often explored design by making multiple sketches and inviting alternative suggestions from his staff . . . He would go over them with the designers, eliminating some, suggesting other lines to follow. He would often go back to the early drawings, reviewing them again and again before making the final decision.[7]

During a 1962 interview, Harrison credited his staff, reminding a *New York Post* reporter that "You can't build a skyscraper alone."[8]

The Time & Life Building was the first of four buildings in Rockefeller Center located on the west side of Sixth Avenue. All were designed by Harrison & Abramowitz & Harris.[9] A graduate of Cornell University, Michael M. Harris (1902-82) began his career in the offices of John Russell Pope and Shreve, Lamb & Harmon. He joined Harrison & Fouilhoux in 1942 and served as assistant in charge of planning at the United Nations, and later, as partner-in-charge of the Dag Hammarskjold Library (1961). During his career, he was affiliated with the Beaux Arts Institute of Design and the School of Architecture at Columbia University. Harris served as the project manager for the Time & Life Building and was responsible for the overall plan and its design. The job captain was Joseph Asseum and Tad Leski was the project designer.

Time, Inc. and Rockefeller Center

Time, Inc. was established by Henry R. Luce and Britton Hadden in 1922. They launched the popular news weekly, *Time*, the following year and over the next decade their publishing empire grew to include the *Fortune*, *Architectural Forum*, and *Life*. In April 1937, Time, Inc. moved from the Chrysler Building to Rockefeller Center.[10] During the mid-1930s, the complex was developing a reputation as a magnet for innovative corporations, especially radio and print-based media companies. Time occupied seven stories (and the penthouse) in what is presently One Rockefeller Plaza (1936-37, a designated New York City Landmark), a thirty-six story tower between 48th and 49th Streets. Designed by the Associated Architects, it was the third tallest building in the complex and the only one to rise without setbacks. A twenty-year lease was signed, and it was subsequently named the Time & Life Building.

Within the decade, Time, Inc. began to outgrow its headquarters. In 1947, it acquired the site of the Marguery Hotel on Park Avenue, between 47th and 48th Streets. Harrison & Abramowitz planned the new building, a 35-story tower, but due to restrictions on construction materials and an ordinance prohibiting the destruction of residential buildings, the project did not proceed. In 1950, the company contemplated moving to Rye, New York. Many prestigious corporations settled in Westchester County during this period, such as General Foods and IBM.[11] While some Time executives supported the move north, the editorial director, John Shaw Billings said:

> The editors are unanimous in their belief that New York does provide some mystical spark

> to the magazines . . . It all adds up to a staff that is habituated to working in the city and has no desire to work in the country . . . For most of our people the natural place to work is the city and the country is the natural place to play and any reversal of that normal concept spells trouble . . . The country is no place to work when you need constant needling and stimulation to do a good high-pressure new job. You vegetate. You smoke a pipe.[12]

After World War II, Rockefeller Center expanded. The Center Theater (1932) on Sixth Avenue was demolished and replaced by an addition to the U.S. Rubber Company Building (Harrison & Abramowitz, 1954) and the Esso Building (Carson & Lundin, 1947), adjacent to Rockefeller Plaza, extended the Center's boundary north to 52nd Street.

The redevelopment of Sixth Avenue had been widely anticipated since the 1930s. Rockefeller Center acquired the site of the Time & Life Building in 1953, hiring Harrison & Abramowitz to design a tower for the center's two most prestigious tenants, NBC and Time, Inc. For two years they prepared plans and elevations, as well as a fifteen minute film. Despite these efforts, NBC withdrew from the project, leaving Time as the sole tenant. Eager to see construction proceed, the directors of Rockefeller Center offered Time a forty-five per cent interest in the project. This was the first time that such an offer had been made to a tenant. Time's board of directors approved the plan in November 1955.

The Time & Life Building[13]

Plans for the building were announced by Nelson Rockefeller, chairman of the board of Rockefeller Center, and Roy Larsen, president of Time, Inc. in December 1956. The George A. Fuller Company, one of the most successful builders in the United States, served as contractor. Established in Chicago in 1882, Fuller specialized in steel-frame construction, erecting such distinguished Manhattan skyscrapers as the Fuller Building (aka the Flatiron Building,1901-3), Lever House (1949-51) and the Seagram Building (1955-58, all are designated New York City Landmarks). They also built the Alcoa Building (c.1953) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, designed by Harrison & Abramowitz.[14]

Excavations began in May 1957. Several buildings occupied the site, as well as a parking lot that originally served as the trolley barn for the New York Railway Company. The largest structure was the four-story Levy Building, containing a cafeteria, dress shops, and bowling alley. Time, Inc.'s editor-in-chief, Luce, and Rockefeller were in attendance at the ground breaking, as well as three hundred employees. The first beam was erected in April 1958 and the steel frame was completed in November 1958.

The Time & Life Building cost $78 million to build. While the elevations were sheathed in limestone to complement the earlier buildings on Sixth Avenue, the various interiors were an expression of modern architectural taste. Many leading figures participated: Alexander Girard designed the ground floor restaurant, La Fonda del Sol; Gio Ponti, the 8th floor auditorium and terrace; Charles Eames the *Time* magazine lobbies and reception areas on the 27th, 28th, and 29th floors; William Tabler, the corporate dining rooms on the 47th floor; and George Nelson & Company, the Hemisphere Club and Tower Suite, the city's highest restaurant, located on the 48th floor.[15]

Luce and the new chairman of the board of Rockefeller Center, Laurence S. Rockefeller, laid the cornerstone in June 1959 and by October the 1.5 million square foot tower was ready for occupancy. In addition to Time, floors were leased to the Shell Oil Company, American Cyanamid Company, N.W. Ayer & Son, the American Petroleum Institute, Pan American International Oil Company, Westinghouse Electric Company, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Planning the Lobby

The ground floor interiors reflect the values of the chief tenant, Time Inc., as well as the planning principles pioneered by Harrison and the Associated Architects at Rockefeller Center during the early 1930s.[16] Eclectic in character, the lobby is a study in contrasts, combining advanced industrial materials with works of fine art. In contrast to the Seagram Building, the lobby is not visible from the street. Flanked on all four sides by large commercial spaces, the sixteen foot high corridors are, for the most part, artificially lit. At the center of the lobby is the service core. It serves to organize the ground floor and contains thirty passenger elevators. Many office towers have this plan after 1945, such as the Secretariat (1950) at the United Nations and the headquarters of Chase Manhattan Bank (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1956-60). The main benefit of this centralized arrangement is a relatively open floor plan. With most of the structural columns situated in the core or elevations, Harris had considerable freedom positioning the entrances, commercial spaces, and public corridors.

While early schemes for the ground floor were symmetrical and oriented toward Sixth Avenue, the final plan suggests a pinwheel, with the entrance passages extending from the service core in various directions.[17] At the east end of the lobby are two groups of revolving doors. The south doors project

onto the 50th Street plaza, and the north doors are located at the end of the breezeway, facing 51st Street. A third group of revolving doors is located near the west end of the 50th Street facade. Incorporated into an open vestibule, it is set within the elevations.[18]

By locating the primary entrances on 50th Street, Harris was able to create a large plaza on Sixth Avenue. This public amenity increased the visibility of tenants at ground level. For instance, immediately behind the fountain was the Time Inc. Reception Center, and in the low wing at the northeast corner at 51st Street was a branch of the Manufacturers Trust Company. The largest commercial tenant was La Fonda del Sol, which occupied an L-shaped space along the west and north sides of the lobby. Uninterrupted by entrances, the irregular plan gave the famed designer, Alexander Girard, considerable freedom in designing the restaurant's interiors.

The four main corridors parallel the street grid, with the elevator banks originally doubling as connecting passages between the north and south corridors. The east or transverse corridor was planned to be the most heavily used. In addition to linking 50th and 51st Streets, it provided the only public entrance to the reception center. The north corridor widens near the east end to incorporate two pairs of escalators and stairs, which serve the second story, underground concourse, and subway.

Introduced into office buildings in the early 1930s, including 30 Rockefeller Plaza and the International Building (both designated New York City Landmarks and Interiors), escalators were strongly endorsed by Harrison who enthusiastically wrote:

> . . . elevator service for the lower three floors is generally a more time-consuming operation than that for the upper stories. In some recent buildings elevator efficiency has been aided by one or more escalator installations on the lower two stories. With a capacity of 5,000 to 6,000 passengers per hour . . . escalators have proved their economy and efficiency.[19]

The south corridor is narrower than the rest, flanked by elevators, and originally, small shops.

Decoration: Stainless Steel Panels

The decorative scheme enlivens the entire lobby, covering the floor, walls, and ceiling. Harrison was the lead architect on most projects commissioned by the Rockefeller family and it is likely that the materials and artworks reflect his professional experience and personal taste. *Architectural Forum* stated, "In that lobby, Architect Harrison was unusually free to do as he preferred."[20]

Whereas plate glass and white marble cover the lobby's outer walls, the service core is wrapped in shimmering stainless steel rectangles that complement the gray and white terrazzo floor. The elevator doors, mail boxes, and shafts are wrapped in Republic Stainless Steel produced by the General Bronze Corporation of Garden City, New York. Chosen for its modern character, the silver-colored panels complement the colors in the terrazzo floor. Developed between 1903 and 1912, stainless steel gained considerable popularity in the late 1920s, used in the elevations of the Chrysler and Empire State Buildings. More resilient than other metals, it was generally used outdoors for non-structural purposes where there was a high potential for corrosion.

Harrison & Abramowitz made extensive use of stainless steel in the design of the Socony-Mobil Building (1954-56) on East 42nd Street. Whereas the exterior panels of the Socony-Mobil Building display an embossed pattern that received conflicting notices from critics, the lobby panels in the Time & Life Building sparkle, providing the building with a sense of industrial glamour. Aligned in a staggered grid, the vertical joints of each panel are displaced a fixed distance from the panel above. This skewed configuration gently animates the wall surface, complementing the swirling pattern of the floor. To further accentuate this, the direction of the brushed finish in each panel alternates between horizontal and vertical.[21]

The Terrazzo Floor

One of the lobby's most memorable features is the floor. Paved in a gray and white serpentine-pattern terrazzo with stainless steel edging, it was laid by the American Mosaic & Tile Company.[22] The undulating bands, which begin in the plaza, extend from east to west, directing the eye toward the tower and along 50th Street, through the revolving doors, and into the lobby.

> An emotional involvement with the building is created on the street, even before entering it, since the plaza design anticipates the main floor shops, lobby and corridor.[23]

Decorative paving became fashionable in New York City during the late 1920s, transforming the character of public vestibules and even sidewalks. It was used in various situations, to set off a building or storefront from its neighbors and to attract customers. One of the earliest examples was the Whitney Museum of American Art on West 8th Street where the sidewalk was laid in a tinted flag-like pattern. At Rockefeller Center, various outdoor spaces, such as Channel

Gardens, were paved with quarry stone. Harrison & Abramowitz further explored this idea at the United Nations, paving the north forecourt and fountain with a pattern similar to that used in the Time & Life Building, as well as on the sidewalk facing the Alcoa Building in Pittsburgh.

Sixth Avenue was renamed the Avenue of the Americas in 1945. During the Second World War and after, there was a strong undercurrent of interest in Latin American culture and architecture, particularly from Brazil. It was promoted by the Museum of Modern Art as a "new national idiom within the international language of modern architecture."[24] Brazilian designers were admired for their use of curvilinear forms, including the landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx and Oscar Niemeyer, an architect who worked closely with Harrison on the United Nations.

Harrison and Nelson Rockefeller shared an enduring interest in Latin America. They traveled to Venezuela together where they built the Hotel Avila (1941) in Caracas and served in the Office of Inter-American Affairs during the Second World War. Harrison wrote a positive review of Stamo Papadaki's *The Work of Oscar Niemeyer* in 1956, which documents an open-air restaurant in Belo Horizonte (1942-47) that incorporated a similar serpentine pavement. Possible sources also include the sidewalk of the Copacabana Beach in Rio and the mosaic forecourt of the opera house (c. 1896) in Manaus, Brazil.[25]

Business concerns may have also played a role in choosing this design. Time, Inc. began to diversify and expand its activities overseas during the 1940s and 1950s, publishing foreign language editions, including *Time/Life International* and *LIFE en Espanol*, a biweekly version of the popular picture weekly. Good-will events were organized and the outdoor space adjoining Sixth Avenue was fittingly named Americas Plaza. Henry Luce spoke at the dedication, calling it a "symbol of man's eternal effort to know his world . . . another symbol of the friendship that must endure between the Americas and their peoples."[26] The following day, 288 signs, illustrating the crests of twenty-two nations in North and South America, as well as the Organization of American States, were dedicated along Sixth Avenue.[27]

Various promotional materials emphasized the floor's exotic character. A special advertising supplement to the *New York Times* featured the building on the cover, juxtaposing the bold vertical lines of the tower against the swirling pattern. This theme was also expressed in the ground floor restaurant. Created by Restaurant Associates, who were also responsible for the Four Seasons (a designated New York City Landmark Interior) in the Seagram Building, La Fonda del Sol was the city's "most lavish" Latin American restaurant.[28] The menu was printed in English, Spanish and Portugese, and the seven dining rooms were praised for their eclectic and lively decor. During the 1960s, Time's commitment to foreign markets would continue, acquiring partial ownership of television and radio stations in Argentina, Peru, and Brazil.

Artworks

Art played a major role in shaping the character of Rockefeller Center, decorating the lobby walls and entrances. A committee of scholars developed a unifying theme for the first phase of construction and mostly figurative imagery was commissioned, including works by Paul Manship and Lee Lawrie. These choices ignored the more daring proposals made by Nelson Rockefeller and Harrison who were both strong supporters of modern European art. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Nelson's mother, co-founded the Museum of Modern Art, and Harrison served on the board of trustees for many years, beginning in 1939.[29] He praised the creation of the New York State Council on the Arts in a speech given in 1960 and later proposed that the city "Revive the proviso to make available one per cent of the cost of any monumental building for sculpture or painting."[30] Harrison counted many artists among his friends, particularly Fernand Leger who produced murals for the architect's home (1942) in Huntington, New York, and in the Assembly Hall of the United Nations (c. 1952).[31]

The lobby illustrates Harrison's interest in modern painting and it is likely he played a lead role in choosing the works that are included in this designation, such as the mural in the east corridor by Fritz Glarner (1899-1972), and in the west corridor, a low relief by Josef Albers (1888-1976). Both are installed on the outer walls of the service core and their size was determined by the dimensions of each surface.

Relational Painting #88

Fritz Glarner's 40 by 15 foot mural is a colorful abstraction, titled *Relational Painting #88*. The oil-on-canvas mural consists of overlapping geometric forms, rendered in yellow, red, and blue, on a whitish-gray background. Born in Zurich, Glarner lived in Paris from 1923-35 and immigrated to the United States in 1936. While in Manhattan, he renewed his friendship with the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian who praised his work for "breathing new life into the neoplastic style."[32] In 1957, he moved to Huntington,

New York, where he produced a series of large works, including a decorative scheme for Nelson Rockefeller's dining room (1963-64) and a mural for the Dag Hammarskjold Library (1962-63) at the United Nations.[33]

As the Time & Life Building neared completion, the art program had still not been finalized. The *Real Estate Forum* reported in 1959:

> The lobby interior will generally reflect the tone of the austere grandeur characteristic of Center buildings. Some sculpture may be used and at least one wall will be graced by a painting by a noted artist, and an additional mural is contemplated.[34]

Glarner produced the mural's maquette in 1958-59. According to Francis Brennan, art advisor to Henry Luce and art director of *Fortune* magazine, it was originally conceived as decoration for the double height interior of the Time Inc. Reception Center.[35] Proposed for the west wall, this large surface had great visibility, especially from Sixth Avenue. Luce favored the idea of using this location to present backlit photographic transparencies by staff photographers, but, due to cost and technical limitations, the idea was abandoned.

To convince Luce that a work of art would be preferable, "art loving Wally Harrison" built a scale model of the reception center to illustrate various solutions:

> When all was quiet, the overhead lights were dimmed, the lights in the model went up and Voila! – there all glowing in all its pristine glory was Mr. Glarner's sketch.[36]

Harrison had been familiar with Glarner's work for many years. He told Luce that Glarner was "one of America's foremost living painters," and that "his work [would] greatly increase in value." Luce, who had significant reservations about modern art, was not persuaded, asserting that such a mural "does nothing for my business."[37]

Glarner's initial sketch, however, was used and by January 1960 a reduced version had been commissioned for the east corridor.[38] He supervised installation of the three panels in April 1960. *Architectural Forum* reported that the primary colors and geometric imagery was "cheering but puzzling spectators as a sort of skew-gee Mondrian"[39] and architectural historian William Jordy praised it for advancing the general quality of art in the Rockefeller Center, calling Glarner's mural a work of "great merit."[40]

Portals

In the west corridor is *Portals* by Josef Albers. Born in Germany, Albers was a highly respected teacher and abstract artist. After more than a decade at the Bauhaus, he immigrated to the United States where he taught design at Black Mountain College and Yale University. While the majority of works he produced were paintings and works on paper, during the 1950s he began an important series of architectural projects, creating walls, windows, ceilings, and even pavements.

Albers met Harrison during the 1930s. They collaborated on several projects, such as a floor design for the U.S. Steel Building (aka Three Mellon Bank Center, 1951) in Pittsburgh and a white marble relief called "Two Constellations"(1959) for the 56th Street lobby of the Corning Glass Works Building at 717 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. This later work, measuring 61 by 16 feet, demonstrated that Albers could work on a large scale. He took great pride in his New York commissions, saying: "My murals are in the lobbies of three buildings, on streets where tens of thousands of pedestrians walk daily."[41]

Portals was installed in April 1961. Measuring 42 by 14 feet, the design was inspired by his celebrated series "Homage to the Square," which Albers commenced in 1950. Each relief consists of thin metal plates of nickel and bronze surrounded by alternating bands of beige and white carrara glass. The materials complement the surrounding surfaces, the silver-toned square resembles stainless steel, and the white bands, marble. Albers said that he chose these materials to "create a surface of receding squares, which, in two dimensions, gives a sense of depth to the wall."[42] A small bronze plaque, set below the relief at right, was provided to help interpret the abstract imagery.[43]

A third artwork was installed in January 1965. Located in the lobby's north corridor, aligned with westernmost elevator bank, this 13 by 6 ½ foot high relief depicts each of the characters in a font of printer's type. Commissioned by Time, and approved by Harrison & Abramowitz, the "author" was Francis Brennan, former art director of *Fortune* magazine. Brennan explained that "the sculpture is symbolic of the basic working tool of Time Inc – the letters of the alphabet. And there is nothing more beautiful than a tool." Based on a typeface (Caslon 471) used in the home workshop of Time employee Amos Bethke, it was fabricated by the General Bronze Corporation."[44]

The Ceiling

Above the gray and white floor and silver walls is a dark maroon ceiling. Designed to contrast with the surrounding materials and to incorporate lighting

fixtures, the tinted glass tiles float against narrow coves that are painted white. During the 1950s, architects experimented with a variety of new glazing materials, both on the exteriors of buildings, and in lobbies. A wide range of colors were employed from blue-green to gray and yellow. One of Harrison & Abramowitz's most notable clients was the Corning Glass Company. The firm designed the company's headquarters (1951) in Corning, New York, and in New York City (1959). The later office building was completed during construction of the Time & Life Building. Both have entrances on the side streets, abstract reliefs by Albers, and make extensive use of glass. The 56th Street lobby of 717 Fifth Avenue originally had a "mirror ceiling of black carrara glass."[45] The dark smooth surface proved impractical due to a tendency to attract and highlight dirt and was later replaced.

In the lobby of the Time & Life Building, a ceiling with different characteristics was chosen. Produced by the American-Saint Gobain Corporation and marketed as Blue Ridge Huetex, the tempered glass panels display a matte finish with a "layer of deep red ceramic enamel fused to the back."[46] These textured squares incorporate the armature for the recessed down lights and are supported at the corners by painted washers. The ceiling was designed to permit removal of the panels for routine maintenance and to access utilities. This solution proved successful and most of the panels are original.

Description

The lobby of the Time & Life Building has three public entrances. On West 50th Street, the *east entrance* has two metal-framed revolving doors, as well as two side doors, which project outside the footprint of the tower. Whereas the metal around the doors is a bronze color, stainless steel frames the outer edges of the transom and side windows. The doors serve as the base for the wing-shaped aluminum awning that begins inside the lobby and projects over the plaza. The *west entrance* is set within a small exterior vestibule and incorporates two identical revolving doors, as well as doors to either side. The north entrance is at 110 West 51st Street. It is located near Sixth Avenue and is reached through a *breezeway* that is illuminated by five rows of possibly original glass ceiling fixtures. The east wall is glazed and the west wall is mainly clad with limestone. The unpolished gray and white paving in the breezeway, installed in 2002, resembles the original and extends from the sidewalk to a glass wall that encloses the lobby. At center are two metal-framed revolving doors.

Within the lobby, there are slight changes in grade; with the floor rising slightly toward 51st Street, and towards Sixth Avenue. The white marble that clads the outer walls of the lobby is unusually pure, with few veins visible. The polished gray and white terrazzo paving is original and extends throughout the interior. The serpentine bands are divided by stainless steel edging. Throughout the lobby, various walls project over a squat terrazzo base that matches the gray sections of the floor. This material is also used in the stairs that descend to the concourse level. The stainless steel hand rails on either side are original.

The service core, containing four banks of passenger elevators, is located in the center of the lobby. The walls, utilities, and doors are clad in stainless steel which extends from floor to ceiling. The mostly original stainless steel panels, which are arranged horizontally, overlap and have four raised stainless steel circles at the corner of each rectangle. The panels were cast to gently curve around each corner. The backlit elevator signs (2 to 8, 8 to 22, 22 to 34, 34 to 46), mail boxes, and elevator doors are historic. Above the doors is a round glass elevator indicator that lights when the car arrives. Toward the east end of the lobby are doors leading to the service elevators. They match the other panels and are identified by the sign "Service cars."

The *east or transverse corridor* extends from 50th to 51st Streets. On the west wall, decorating nearly the entire outer wall of the service core, is a colorful abstract mural by Fritz Glarner. At the south end, on a thin marble base, is the original framed label identifying the work of art and its meaning. Along the east wall at either end are historic glazed entrances. The *north corridor* is the widest passage, incorporating four escalators and stairs. The east escalators ascend to the second story and the west escalators descend to the concourse. The sides are covered with stainless steel. Beneath the east escalators, the surface is plaster and incorporates a row of recessed lighting fixtures, as well as a backlit sign. A single set of stairs are separated from the escalators by a marble-clad pier.

West of the stairs on the north wall are the original floor-to-ceiling display windows that now frame the historic store entrance. On the north wall is a bronze relief depicting the alphabet. Commissioned by Time, Inc. and installed in 1965, it is not original to the lobby. Near the west end of the north wall are glazed entrance doors to a commercial space. On the east side of the *west corridor* is a glass and metal relief by Josef Albers. The edges of the relief meet the stainless steel panels on either side. A stainless steel molding runs along the top and bottom. At lower right, below the relief, is a bronze plaque describing the relief. The west wall is mainly clad with white marble and

stainless steel. At the south end is the glazed retail entrance, and to the north, a backlit sign and transom that once served as an entrance leading to a commercial space. It is flanked by stainless steel doors.

The ceiling is covered with dark red glass tiles that float against narrow coves that are painted white and incorporate ventilation grilles. At each corner, a round washer has been painted to match the ceiling. The majority of tiles are historic. The lobby is illuminated by recessed lights that are incorporated into the ceiling design. There are three rows in the north corridor and the lights are located at the intersection of every fourth pair of panels. Over the works of art, they are arranged close together in a single row, at the intersection of four panels.

A non-historic security camera is installed on the ceiling in the lobby's northwest corner. The metal and glass security rails, adjoining some of the elevator banks, are non-historic.

Researched and written by
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NOTES

1. The author wishes to thank Bill Hooper, archivist, and Pamela Wilson, manager, of the Time Inc. Archives, as well as Janet Parks, curator of drawings, and Louis DiGennaro, assistant to the curator of drawings, in the Department of Drawings at the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University. The papers of Wallace K. Harrison and Max Abramowitz are located in the Avery Library.

2. Sarah B. Landau and Carl W. Condict, *The Rise of the New York Skyscraper 1965-1913* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996), 71-75.

3. "The Elevator Equipment of the Ivins Syndicate Building, Park Row, New York," *Engineering News* 40 (April 27, 1899), 273.

4. Paul Goldberger, "Wallace Harrison Dead at 86: Rockefeller Center Architect," *New York Times*, December 3, 1981, 1; Victoria Newhouse, *Wallace K. Harrison, Architect* (NY: Rizzoli International Publications, 1989); Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Rockefeller Center* (NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1978). Many building and some public interiors in Rockefeller Center are designated New York City Landmarks. For a complete list, see Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Rockefeller Center Designation Report*, LP-1446, report prepared by Janet Adams and others (NY: City of New York, 1985).

5. "Designer for Listening: Max Abramowitz," *New York Times*, December 2, 1959, 52.

6. Herbert Wind, "A Taxi to the United Nations," *The New Yorker* (December 4, 1954), 55. This was the last of a three-part profile devoted to Harrison. The others were published on November 20 and 27, 1954.

7. George A. Dudley, "Oscar Nitzchke in America -- A Personal Perspective," *Oscar Nitzchke-Architect* (New York: Cooper Union, 1985), 60.

8. *New York Post*, December 4, 1962, 37.

9. "Michael M. Harris, Architect," *New York Times*, August 19, 1982; Obituary, *AIA Journal*, October 1982, 103. Other works credited to Harris include 860 and 870 United Nations Plaza (1966), a pair of mixed-use towers commissioned by Alcoa. See Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City*, 4th edition (Three Rivers Press, 2000), 306.

10. *Rockefeller Center Designation Report*, 195-201.

11. See "The Suburbanization of Work" in Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1960* (NY: The Monacelli Press, 1995), 1072-83.

12. "Manhattan Transfer," *FYI* (December 14, 1956), 3.

13. "A tall tower for TIME INC." *Architectural Forum* (January 1958).

14. Clad almost entirely in aluminum panels, the Alcoa Building was one of Harrison & Abramowitz's most innovative office building designs. The massing is similar to the Time & Life Building, juxtaposing a slender tower beside a low horizontal form. Newhouse, 147.

15. These interiors have been significantly altered. For a discussion of the *Time* magazine reception areas, see John Neuhart et al, *Eames Design* (New York: Abrams, 1989), see 1960-1961.

16. For discussions of the Time & Life Building and lobby, see "Rockefeller Center's New Time & Life Building" (New York: Time, Inc., 1959); Ada Louise Huxtable, "The Significance of Our Skyscrapers" and "Some New Skyscrapers and How They Grew," *New York Times*, October 30, 1960, section 2, 13, November 6, 1960, section 2, 12; Krinsky, 112-13, 117-18, 157-61; John Tauranac, *Essential New York* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 205-6; Carter Horsley, "The Midtown Book-The Time & Life Building," www.thecityreview.com/timelife; "The Time-Life Building," www.angelfire.com/home/iNetwork/NYC/nyc3 "Solid Profile: The Time & Life Building," *The Center* (January/February 1992); Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, *New York 1960* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 398-402; David W. Dunlap, "Press L for Landmark: Time & Life Lobby, a 50s Gem, Awaits Recognition," *New York Times*, June 17, 2002, B1.

17. A covered arcade was originally planned along 50th Street, with retail shops and exhibition spaces. At the center of the building a transverse, north-south, corridor was envisioned, linking 50th and 51st Streets. While similar features were incorporated into the building's final design, they were substantially reconfigured. Press Release, Rockefeller Center, December 14, 1956, Time, Inc. Archives.

18. A second breezeway, on Sixth Avenue, is closed.

19. Wallace K. Harrison, "Office Buildings," *Forms & Functions of Twentieth Century Architecture*, vol 4., edited by Talbot Hamlin (NY: Columbia University Press), 1952, 154.

20. *Architectural Forum*, August 1960, 143ff.

21. The Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx experimented with a similar pattern, juxtaposing squares of light and dark grasses. See image of terrace for Inocente Palacios (1957) in Caracas, Venezuela, in Elizabeth B. Kassler, *Modern Gardens and the Landscape* (NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1964), 53.

22. Terrazzo is a marble aggregate frequently used in decorative pavements. Developed in the 18th century, it was introduced as a substitute for mosaic floors and consists of marble chips laid into a matrix of cement and then ground smooth or polished. See Richard Stamm, "Terrazzo: A Classic Floor," *Smithsonian Preservation Quarterly* (Spring 1995) or www.si.edu/oahp/spq/spq95p3.htn.

23. "Rockefeller Center's New Time & Life Building," a special advertising supplement to the *New York Times*, October 25, 1959, section 10, 6.

24. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Latin American Architecture Since 1945* (NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 12. During World War II, under Nelson Rockefeller, Harrison lived in Washington, DC, and served as the deputy coordinator of cultural resources in the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. This agency was responsible for shaping the government's policy in Latin America.

25. Paul F. Damaz, *Art in Latin American Architecture* (NY: Reinhold Pub. Corp.,1963), 218.

26. "Remarks of Henry R. Luce," October 3., 1960, Time Inc. Archives. At the dedication, two boy scouts, one of Latin descent, hoisted the flag of the Organization of American States. *FYI*, October 7, 1960, 1.

27. "Ave. of Americas to Get Shields of the Nations," *New York Times*, April 1, 1960; "Americas Plaza," *FYI*, September 30, 1960, 7; Andrew Hepburn, *Complete Guide to New York City* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1964), 83. In addition, at this time, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, and (pre-Castro) Cuba donated statues of their national heroes. See Croswell Bowden, "Topics: In Search of Sixth Avenue," *New York Times*, April 1, 1970.

28. Craig Claiborne, "3 City Restaurants Boast Dramatic New Interiors," *New York Times*, September 22, 1960, 22; "Food News: Latin-American Zest on Midtown Menu," December 9, 1960, 35.

29. For a list of Harrison's philanthropic activities, see Newhouse, 145.

30. Unpublished manuscripts, dated September 1960, and November 11, 1963, 11. Papers of Wallace K. Harrison, Avery Library, Columbia University.

31. For photographs of the Leger murals associated with Harrison, see Newhouse 66, 135.

32. Obituary, *New York Times*, September 19, 1972, 37; Margit Staber, *Fritz Glarner* (Zurich: ABC-Verlag, 1976).

33. The library, financed by the Ford Foundation, was designed by Harrison & Abramowitz & Harris.

34. "Rockefeller Center's new 48-story Time & Life Building, *Real Estate Forum* (June 1959), n.p.

35. Francis "Hank" Brennan, letter to John Manner, January 1988, Time Inc. Archives.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Harrison donated the three mural-sized sketches to the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College in 1968. The credit reads: "Gift of Wallace K. Harrison, Class of 1950H, in honor of Nelson Rockefeller, Class of 1930." Each sketch measures approximately 90 by 68 inches. Harrison donated many artworks to this museum, including works by Leger, Picasso, Kandinsky, and Albers. See *Thank you, Wallace K. Harrison* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College, 1985).

39. *Architectural Forum*, August 1960, 143.

40. William H. Jordy, "Rockefeller Center and Corporate Urbanism," *American Buildings and Their Architects*: *The Impact of Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), 76.

41. Quoted in Neal David Berenza, *The Murals and Sculptures of Josef Albers* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1985), 69.

42. "What Is That Thing On The Wall?" *FYI* (January 18, 1968), 1, Time Archives.

43. Albers produced a second mural for Rockefeller Center in c. 1972. *Reclining Figure* is located in the lobby of the Celanese Building at 1211 Sixth Avenue, which was designed by the same architectural team. Berenza, 150.

44. "Cast of Characters," *FYI* (January 29, 1965), 1.

45. "Corning's Building Gets Glass Decor," *New York Times*, April 26, 1959, R1. While Newhouse credits Harrison (with Charles Abbe) for the building's design, a *New York Times* profile, "Designer for Listening," identifies Abramowitz as the architect.

46. American-Saint Gobain used the lobby of the Time & Life Building in their advertisements, saying that the glass "adds luxury and drama." See tearsheets, Abramowitz papers, Avery Archives.

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 Time & Life Building, ground floor interior, 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; and that the interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that the Time & Life Building, ground floor interior, is one of the most striking mid-twentieth century interiors in New York City; that the building is located on Sixth Avenue between West 50th and 51st Streets; that it was designed by Michael M. Harris, of the architectural firm Harrison & Abramowitz & Harris as a joint venture of Time, Inc. and Rockefeller Center in 1956-60; that in contrast to most buildings in Rockefeller Center it is entered from the cross streets, through revolving doors, and on 51st Street, by a covered breezeway; that the north corridor incorporates escalators and stairs to provide access to the lower concourse and subway; that the eclectic and colorful decorative scheme enlivens the entire lobby, including the floors, walls, and ceiling; that whereas glass and white marble cover the outer walls, the central service core is wrapped in stainless panels which complement the gray and white terrazzo floor laid in a serpentine pattern; that abstract works by noted artists Fritz Glarner and Josef Albers are located near the entrances on 50th Street; and, that the plan and decoration was inspired by the planning principles pioneered in Rockefeller Center during the 1930s, as well as the mainstream acceptance of the International Style by the mid-1950s.

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 an Interior Landmark the Time & Life Building, ground floor interior, consisting of the West 50th Street entrances and the enclosed breezeway leading to the West 51st Street entrance, the lobby and elevator halls, incorporating the east, west, south and north corridors, as well as the escalators adjacent to the north corridor descending to the lower concourse and rising to the second story; the stairs descending to the lower concourse, and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, works of art, signs, entrance doors, elevator doors, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, and lighting fixtures; 1261-1277 Sixth Avenue (aka 101-133 West 50th Street and 100-130 West 51st Street), Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1003, Lot 29, as its Landmark Site.

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
East corridor, looking south
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
50th Street entrance, view from east corridor
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
East corridor, looking north toward breeze way
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
Breeze way, looking south toward East Corridor
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
North corridor, looking west
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
North corridor, elevator banks
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
North corridor, looking east
Photo: Carl Forster

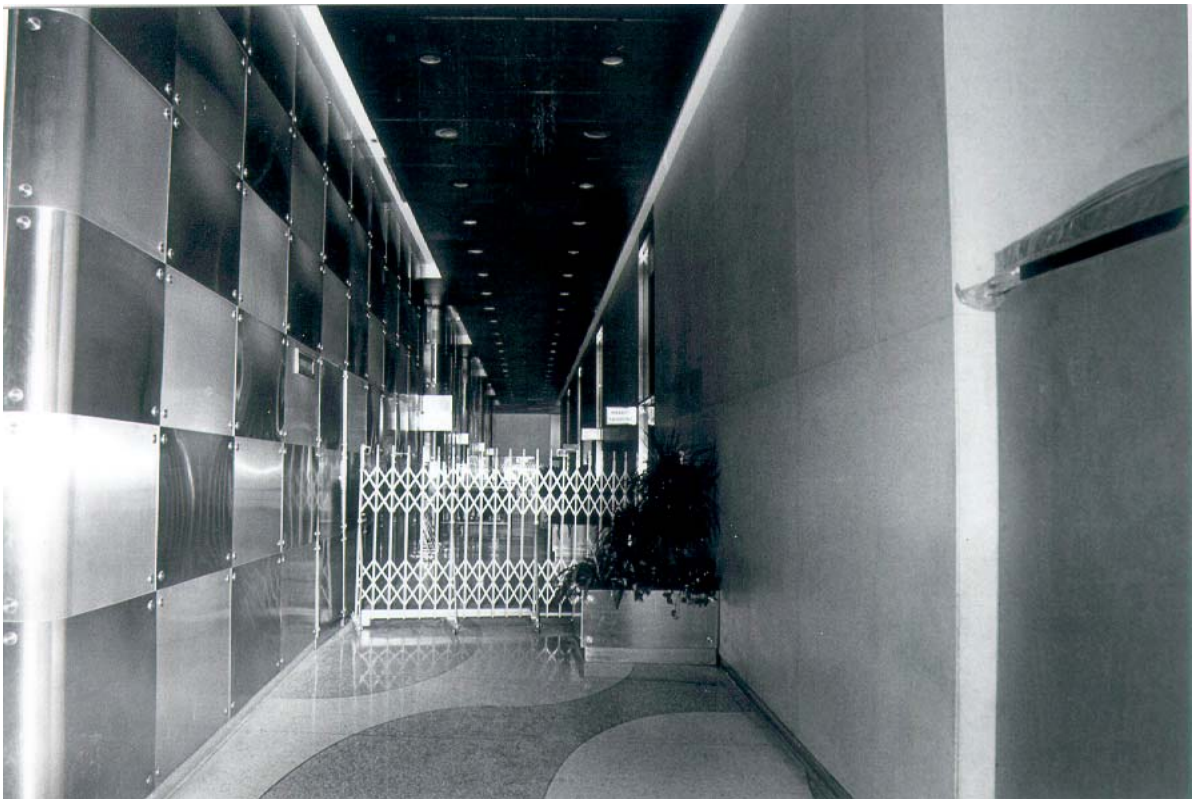
Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
North corridor, elevator banks, west end
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
North corridor, escalators, looking west
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
North corridor, escalators, looking east
Photo: Carl Forster

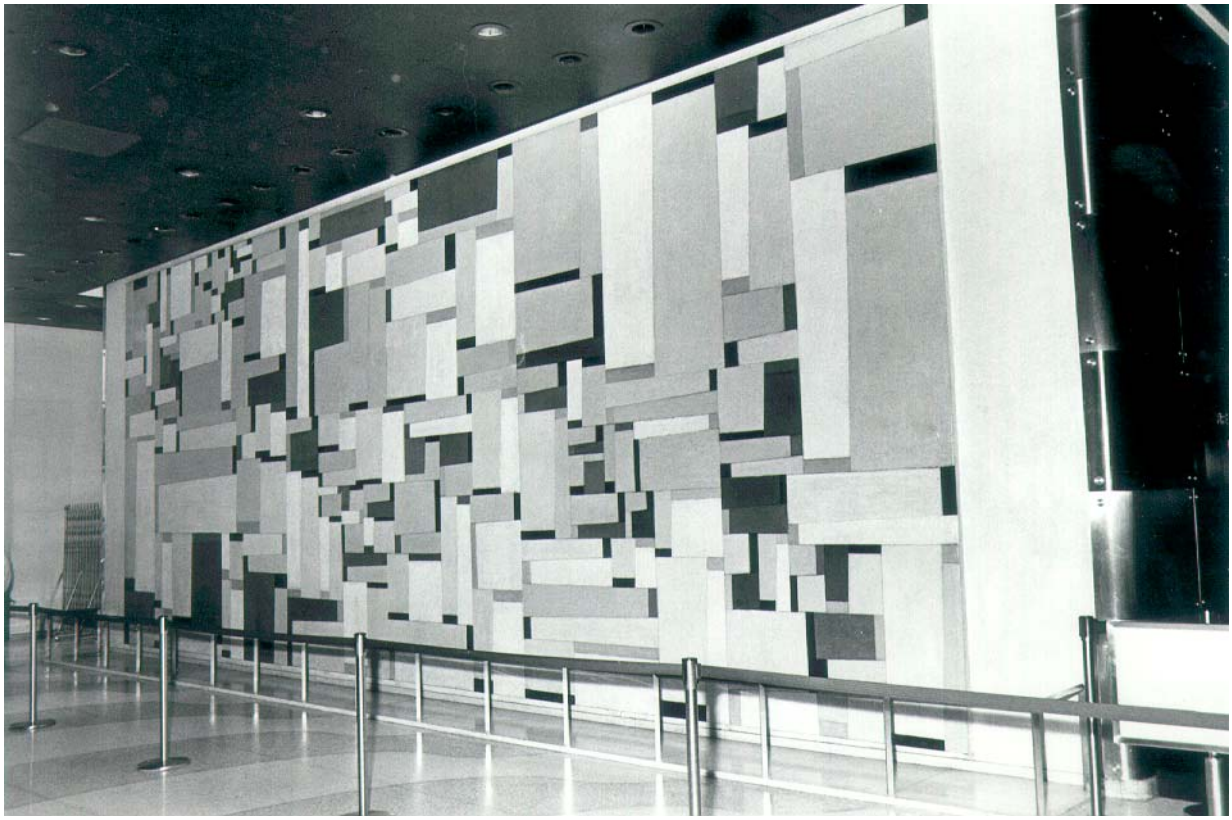
Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
North corridor, stairs to lower concourse
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
South corridor, looking west
Photo: Carl Forster



Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
South corridor, looking west
Photo: Carl Forster

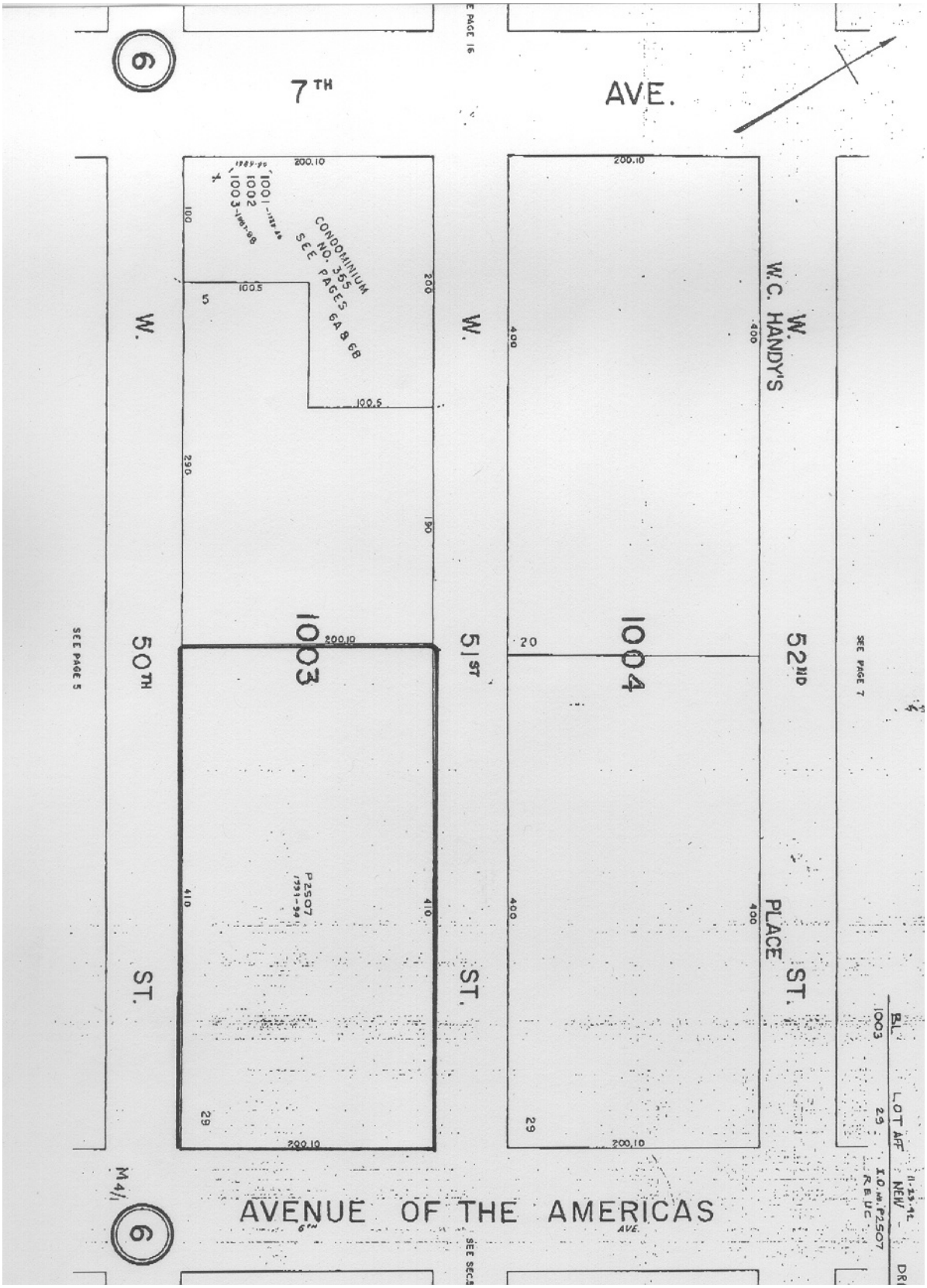
Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
West corridor: *Portals*
Photo: Carl Forster



Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
East corridor: *Relational Painting #88*
Photo: Carl Forster

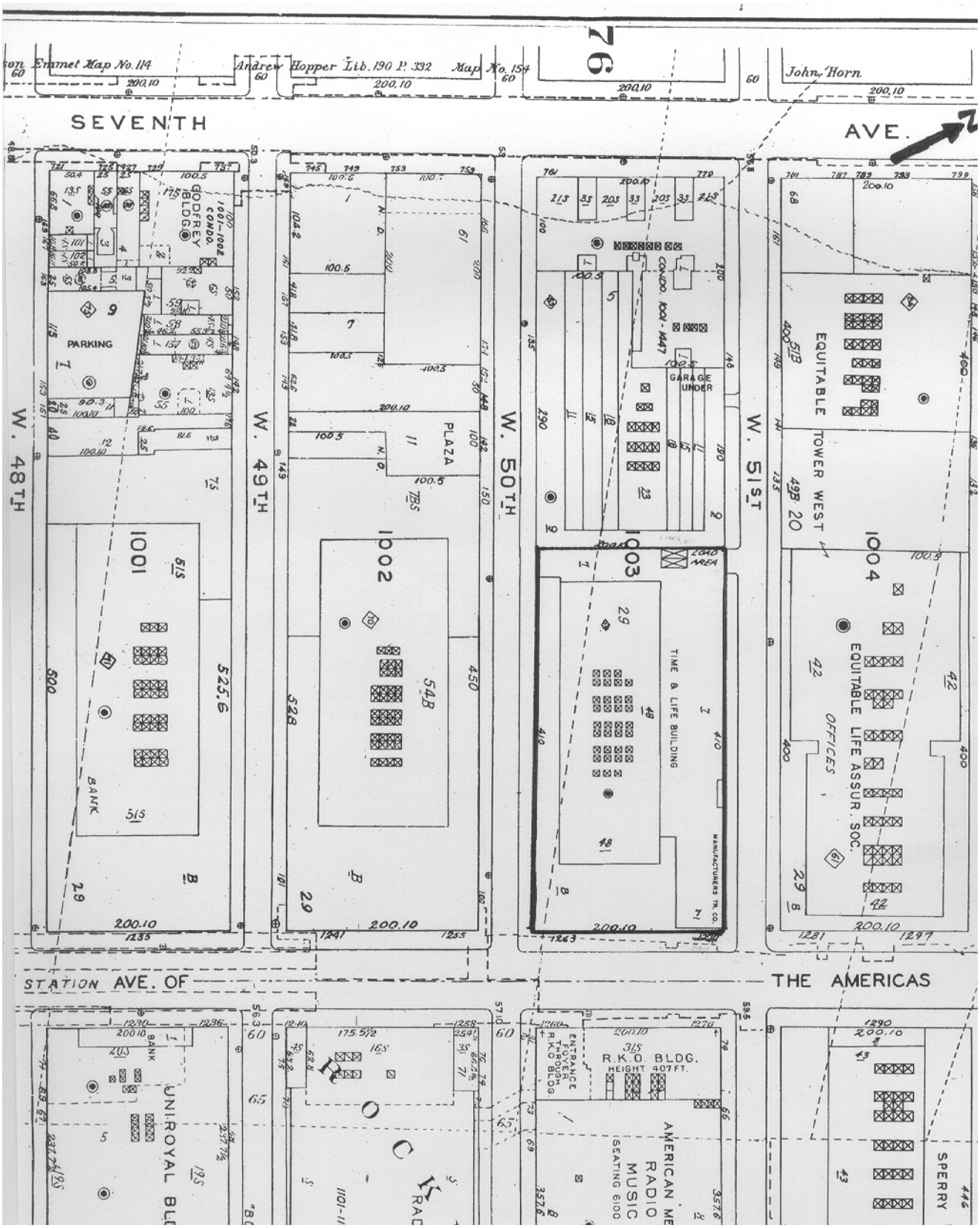
Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
West corridor, west wall
Photo: Carl Forster

Time and Life Building, ground floor interior
Elevator bank, second from east, looking north
Photo: Carl Forster



Time and Life Building, 1261-1277 Sixth Avenue (aka 101-133 West 50th Street and 100-130 West 51st Street), Manhattan. Block 1003, Lot 29

Source: Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map



Time and Life Building, 1261-1277 Sixth Avenue (aka 101-133 West 50th Street and 100-130 West 51st Street), Manhattan. Block 1003, Lot 29

Source: Sanborn, *Manhattan Landbook* (2000-2001), plate 76.