Landmarks Preservation Commission
June 20, 1995; Designation List 265
LP-1920

(Former) **PEPSI-COLA BUILDING** (now ABN-Amro Bank Building), 500 Park Avenue, a/k/a 62 East 59th Street, Manhattan. Built 1958-60. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects; Gordon Bunshaft, design partner; Natalie de Blois, senior designer for project.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1294, Lot 37.

On June 15, 1993, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the (former) Pepsi-Cola Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 16). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses, including a representative of the Municipal Art Society, spoke in favor of designation and no witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. A representative of the owner expressed uncertainty about the proposed designation, but subsequently communicated support for it. The Commission subsequently received two written submissions in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

Located on a prominent corner site along Park Avenue, a thoroughfare associated since the 1950s with sleek, understated modern monuments to corporate America, the Pepsi-Cola Building is one of New York's seminal International Style landmarks. Its superb design, innovative technology, and production as a collaborative effort are all qualities for which the firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill was already famous: design partner Gordon Bunshaft guided the firm's New York office, and Natalie de Blois, among the very few women architects at that time, was the senior designer for the project. Throughout its existence, the building has been praised by architectural critics for its clever siting and gemlike treatment, and especially for its sophisticated curtain wall, a nearly smooth skin of gray-green glass and aluminum spandrels. Commissioned as an architecturally distinctive corporate symbol of the Pepsi-Cola Company following that organization's astounding success during the 1950s, the building's later occupants similarly have been important businesses, including the Olivetti Underwood Corporation and the ABN-Amro Bank. Despite the addition of a mixed-use tower on the adjacent East 59th Street site (not included in this designation), the original SOM-designed structure remains largely intact.

History of the Site[1]

Park Avenue, originally known as Fourth Avenue and ceded to the city in 1828, was incrementally opened between East 38th and East 130th streets. Beginning in the 1830s, the center of the avenue had grade-level railroad tracks serving the New York & Harlem and, later, the New Haven Railroads. As railroad traffic increased, the avenue was widened to permit additional tracks. Due to the danger and nuisance of later locomotive trains, the city mandated that tracks be lowered below grade in an open cut. In 1872-74, railroad tracks were lowered into tunnels, bridges were built, and the remaining area was landscaped at grade around open wells. Though transformed gradually over several decades, Fourth Avenue was still grimy when, in the 1880s, it was renamed Park Avenue up to East 96th Street. In the vicinity of East 59th Street, Park Avenue was largely undeveloped, though there were a few structures which housed cultural organizations and some of the side streets contained long rows of brownstone-fronted dwellings and several stables.[2]

By the first decade of the twentieth century, institutional buildings had been occupied by different groups[3] and other newcomers included two libraries, multiple dwellings of six-to-eight stories, and, on the southwest corner of Park Avenue and East 59th Street, the nine-story administration building (1898) of the Board of Education. In conjunction with the reconstruction of Grand Central Terminal (1903-13) and the electrification of the railroad (1903-07), Park Avenue was rebuilt with a planted mall and the open wells were covered over. The avenue gradually became a thoroughfare lined with large apartment houses for the wealthy. Despite the submerged railroad tracks, Park Avenue and its new buildings remained tremor-free since the roadway and the adjacent apartment buildings were erected above the tracks on separate systems of steel columns with insulating vibration mats.

The 1916 zoning resolution designated the portion of Park Avenue north of East 50th Street as residential; buildings from this period of development include the thirty-two-story Hotel Delmonico (1927) at the northwest corner of East 59th Street and forty-one-story Ritz Tower Hotel (1925) at the northeast corner of East 57th Street. However, by 1929 major property owners on the avenue, which was overtaking Fifth Avenue as the city's most prestigious address, succeeded in having the area between East 50th and 59th streets rezoned to permit commercial use. Not until the building boom that followed World War II did these efforts come to fruition, beginning with the completion in 1947 of the Universal Pictures Building at 445 Park Avenue, designed by Kahn & Jacobs. The transformation of Park Avenue into a commercial avenue known as the "Miracle Mile" was assured by the rash of new office buildings in the 1950s: Lever House at 390 Park Avenue (1950-52, a designated New York City Landmark); the Olin Building at No. 460 (1954-55); the Colgate-Palmolive Building at No. 300 (1954-55); No. 425 Park Avenue (1956); and the Seagram Building at No. 375 (1956-58, a designated Landmark).[4] No less significant was the erection of the Pepsi-Cola Building (1958-60, see fig. 1) at 500 Park Avenue;[5] it replaced a nine-story city-owned building that had been sold at public auction in June 1956 to the Pepsi-Cola Company for a record $2 million. It was the largest sale of city-owned property at that time; the 100-foot-by-125-foot plot fetched $160 per square foot. Erected in 1898, the structure had been occupied by the administrative offices of the Board of Education for forty-two years and later accommodated a variety of municipal agencies. Pepsi-Cola, in turn, sold the site to the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company of Boston, which then issued a lease and construction agreement to Pepsi.

Pepsi-Cola Company and Alfred N. Steele[6]

Carbonated beverages were enjoyed for over a century before North Carolina pharmacist Caleb D. Bradham (d. 1934) concocted a stomach tonic in 1898 for his friends which he would soon call "Pepsin Cola." He began mixing and packaging his own syrup and four years later co-founded the Pepsi-Cola Company. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Pepsi-Cola was bottled at several locations in the Southeast and was marketed as a refreshing, restorative drink, so that by 1910 it had become a household name, though significantly less successful than its main competitor, Coca-Cola. Beginning in the late 1930s, the company was directed from its Long Island City bottling plant by Harvard-educated Walter S. Mack, Jr., who (in the face of a legal

challenge by Coca-Cola) successfully defended Pepsi-Cola's right to use the word "cola." He also established a franchise system for bottling the beverage, had an elegant new bottle designed, arranged for sugar supplies during wartime rationing, and experimented with innovative forms of advertising — particularly skywriting and brief radio commercials featuring catchy jingles. Pepsi-Cola bottles were twice as large as the equally-priced bottles of Coca-Cola, as the first nationally-aired tune reminded customers:

Pepsi-Cola hits the spot
Twelve full ounces, that's a lot,
Twice as much for a nickel, too,
Pepsi-Cola is the drink for you.

Advertising Pepsi as a bargain drink, though a successful tactic during the Depression, was a disaster after World War II, when Americans sought to celebrate economic prosperity. Increased bottling costs and changes in the retailing of beverages put Pepsi at a further disadvantage. Between 1946 and 1949 Pepsi-Cola profits plunged and Mack retired, following a move of the company's headquarters into Manhattan.

In 1950 the company hired as its new president Nashville-born Alfred N. Steele (1901-1959), an alumnus of Northwestern University who had worked in newspaper publishing and broadcasting, the petroleum business, and advertising, before becoming vice president of the Coca-Cola Company. His aggressive and forward-looking policies have been credited with accelerating Pepsi-Cola's fortunes during the 1950s. Steele installed cost accounting, slashed administrative expenses, and reduced the number of executives. He divided the country into eight regional districts and allowed a high level of autonomy in the field, permitting the parent company to focus on overall policy and operations planning. Steele spent millions of dollars buying and building many bottling plants, both in the U.S. and abroad, and heavily invested in equipment. He even altered the product by desweetening the beverage, introducing a smaller, eight-ounce bottle, replacing the paper label with color applied to the bottle, and selling Pepsi-Cola through vending machines. Finally, Steele radically reoriented the advertising and merchandising of Pepsi-Cola, replacing the old emphasis on economy with a program which stressed quality.

These innovations yielded immediate, spectacular results. Between 1950 and 1955, sales increased by 112 per cent (compared to twenty-nine per cent for the industry), while Pepsi-Cola earnings per share skyrocketed from $0.28 to $1.60. The company's assets grew from $23 million in 1952 to $59 million in 1955. Between 1950 and the dedication of the Park Avenue headquarters in 1960, sales had quadrupled and earnings soared from $1.3 million to $13 million. In the decade preceding 1960, about 170 new plants and distribution centers had been built in the United States and 140 overseas; Pepsi-Cola bottlers had invested more in their equipment than had the rest of the industry combined. Pepsi's share of the domestic cola market rose from one-fifth to over one-third. In his 1959 obituary, Steele, by then board chairman and chief executive officer of Pepsi-Cola, was recognized for his transformation of that company as well as for his philanthropic activities; his achievements overshadowed the fact that his widow was film star Joan Crawford, who had become the personification of Pepsi's new and glamorous image in the media. Among the most visible products of Steele's multi-faceted campaign to promote Pepsi-Cola was the company's sleek new headquarters, located on fashionable Park Avenue, designed by the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and built in 1958-60. The building was completed after Steele's death, while the company was directed by Donald M. Kendall; the headquarters was still under construction when Kendall arranged for a memorable advertising stunt: at the 1959 Moscow Trade Fair, political adversaries Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev posed together for the international press in front of the Pepsi booth.

The International Style and the Pepsi-Cola Building[7]

The modernism exemplified by the Pepsi-Cola Building is that of the second wave of the International Style which flourished in this country in the post-World War II period. This style was given its name in 1932 when architect Philip Johnson and historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock organized a momentous exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in which they presented a body of avant-garde modernist architecture that they argued represented a new "International Style" within the modernist movement.[8] The exhibition was accompanied by a book that served as an important English-language manifesto for vanguard European modernism. It identified the essential principles which informed

the work of International Style architects, regardless of their country of origin. First, because in modern skeleton-frame construction the building was completely supported by the columns and floor slabs, the walls were subordinate elements serving only to enclose space; thus, the effect of volume, "or more accurately, of plane surfaces bounding a volume" supplanted the effect of mass as "the prime quality of architecture."[9] Second, since modern economics favored the use of standardized parts and since modern construction techniques favored the use of regularly spaced supports to equalize stress, "good modern architecture" should be expressed by "an aesthetic ordering" of structural members and standardized, modular components. However, to avoid monotony, asymmetrical compositions (especially when they differentiate functional differences in the building's program) were to be preferred. Finally, applied decoration was to be avoided. To demonstrate that walls had no load-bearing function, supporting columns in International Style buildings were often set back from the outermost edges of the floor slabs and in some cases buildings were raised up on stilts or *pilotis*. Wall surfaces were flat and smooth, broken only by horizontal bands of windows or in some cases replaced entirely by glass. Roofs were flat and often topped by landscaped decks.

A worldwide depression in the 1930s, and the rise of authoritarian governments in Germany, Russia, and Italy which favored conservative architecture, and later the disruptions caused by World War II severely restricted the number of new buildings produced by avant-garde architects in Europe; however, the widespread publication of existing works and the emigration of such key figures as Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, both of whom found academic positions at schools of architecture in the United States, inspired a new generation of architects and presaged the broad acceptance of the International Style in the post-World War II period.

Gordon Bunshaft was among this younger generation of architects in America, which also included Eero Saarinen, Wallace K. Harrison, I.M. Pei, and Philip Johnson, who were particularly influenced by European modernism. Mies, himself, had a successful career in the United States, producing a number of buildings in Chicago which were to have a major impact on American architecture. At the Armour Institute (later the Illinois Institute of Technology, master plan 1939-41, buildings 1942-56) and Lake Shore Drive Apartments (1948-51), Mies sought to reduce his buildings to skeletons of polished metal with glass "skins" which achieve their beauty through a clear articulation of structure and proportional relationships, and refined detailing. Mies's American buildings influenced Bunshaft in his design for the Pepsi-Cola Building. Among the particularly Miesian elements of Bunshaft's design were the nearly smooth curtain wall (appearing as a visually weightless and taut, impenetrable skin) and the thin vertical mullions, which were projected from the otherwise smooth walls, creating shadows to provide texture and depth and emphasizing the skeletal construction of the building.

Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill[10]

The firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill was established in 1936 in Chicago by Louis Skidmore (1897-1962) and Nathaniel Owings (1903-1984). By 1950, in addition to the original headquarters, the firm had established offices in New York City, San Francisco, and Portland, Oregon. Although the offices were managed locally, professional expertise was shared among them, and they followed a common approach to building design and project management. Organized along the model of a large business enterprise with numerous employees (currently several hundred) trained in a variety of disciplines, the firm was able to offer a complete package of architectural, interior and environmental design, engineering, planning, and project management. Among its major innovations within the field of architecture was a team approach, in which a core group consisting of an administrative partner, a design partner, a project manager, senior designers, and technical personnel remained constant on a project in order to ensure consistency and integrity of design. From its inception, the firm made the ideological commitment to design only in the modern mode and "embraced the belief that architecture could improve the quality of human life."[11]

The firm's New York office opened in 1937, when Skidmore and Owings were offered a commission for alterations to the New York offices of the American Radiator Company, on the condition that a partner remain in New York to supervise the work. By 1939 the partners decided to keep two non-centralized offices, with Skidmore at the head of the New York branch and Owings in

charge of the Chicago office. Specialists were hired in varied disciplines in order to take on larger commissions. One of these specialists was John O. Merrill, an architectural engineer who joined the firm as a limited partner in 1939. Two years earlier, Gordon Bunshaft had been hired as a designer. His imprint was eventually to shape the design image of SOM.

Born in Buffalo, New York, to Russian immigrant parents, Gordon Bunshaft (1909-1990) was educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in architecture and came under the influence of a young professor, Lawrence B. Anderson, who fostered an appreciation of modernist design. Bunshaft worked briefly for Edward Durrell Stone and Raymond Loewy before beginning his forty-two year career at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. In his early years with the firm he designed buildings for the New York World's Fair of 1939-40 and Hostess House (1941-42), a hospitality center for cadets at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois. After serving in the Corps of Engineers during World War II, Bunshaft rejoined SOM in 1947. Later that year he transferred to the firm's New York office, and in 1949 he became a full partner. It was as chief designer for Lever House (1950-52, a designated Landmark) that Bunshaft first earned renown. In the words of architectural critic Paul Goldberger, this twenty-four story office tower was "New York's first major commercial structure with a glass curtain-wall (only the United Nations Secretariat preceded it), and it burst onto the stuffy, solid masonry wall of Park Avenue like a vision of a new world."[12]

Following Lever House, Bunshaft was involved in the design of a number of outstanding buildings, including the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company headquarters (1957) in Bloomfield, Connecticut; the Pepsi-Cola Building (1958-60) on Park Avenue; No. 140 Broadway (1960) and the Chase Manhattan Bank Headquarters and Plaza (1960-61) in lower Manhattan; the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (1963) at Yale University; the W.R. Grace Building (1973) on West 42nd Street; the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (1971) at the University of Texas, Austin; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (1974) in Washington, D.C.; and the National Commercial Bank (1983) in Jedda, Saudi Arabia. Of his work, Goldberger observed:

> *Mr. Bunshaft never let down the flag of modern architecture. He believed deeply that the International Style of glass, metal and stone was the proper architectural expression for the 20th century, and that any attempt to return to the styles of the past was trivial and faddish. ... Mr. Bunshaft's work did evolve. But it was more a shift from an earlier, lighter kind of modernism, characterized by glass and metal and sense that his buildings could almost float, to heavier, more massive travertine. His earlier buildings, like the glass slabs of Lever House ... or the Pepsi-Cola Building five blocks to the north, ... received nearly unanimous praise from the critics. Lewis Mumford, writing in The New Yorker, called the [Pepsi-Cola] building "an impeccable achievement ... It says all that can be said, delicately, accurately, elegantly, with surfaces of glass."*[13]

Gordon Bunshaft was awarded the Brunner Prize of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1955, and its Gold Medal in 1984. He also received the Medal of Honor from the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He was awarded the Pritzker Prize, often called the architectural equivalent of the Nobel Prize, in 1988, two years before his death.

Senior Designer Natalie de Blois[14]

SOM's reputation for tastefully innovative design was in part earned by the firm's one female senior designer, Natalie de Blois, whose ground-breaking career has been largely overlooked by historians, in part due to the corporate organization of the SOM firm. De Blois (b. 1921) joined the staff of SOM in 1944, soon after graduating from Columbia University's School of Architecture. After winning a Fulbright Fellowship to study at the Parisian École des Beaux-Arts, she returned to the firm, working with partners Gordon Bunshaft, Robert W. Cutler, and William S. Brown as a basic design coordinator — responsible for programming, design, presentation, working drawings, and interiors, as well as coordinating with members of the structural and mechanical trades. De Blois worked on many of the firm's commissions, including the Terrace Plaza Hotel (1948-50) in Cincinnati; United States Consulate (1954) in Düsseldorf; U.S. Consulate Housing (1954) in Bremen; Hilton Hotel (1955) in Istanbul; Connecticut General Life Insurance Company

Headquarters (1957) in Bloomfield, Conn.; Pepsi-Cola Headquarters (1958-60) and Union Carbide Corporation Headquarters (1960), both on Park Avenue; and the Emhart Corporation Headquarters (1963) in Bloomfield. The Terrace Plaza Hotel project is of particular significance to the history of the firm since it initiated SOM's interior design department, at that time directed by Benjamin Baldwin, who was assisted by Natalie de Blois and Davis Allen; the team designed everything from furniture to china to uniforms.

In 1965 de Blois transferred to SOM's Chicago office, where she was finally made a design associate and worked with Bruce Graham on the Boots Pure Drug Headquarters (1968) in Nottingham, England, and the Hartford Fire Insurance Building (1970-71) in Chicago; and with Myron Goldsmith on Equibank (1976) in Pittsburgh. In a 1971 interview,[15] she noted that a successful woman architect "has to have a very strong personality" given "very chauvinistic" male colleagues. Nonetheless, de Blois was fortunate to have had "a wonderful working relationship" with Bunshaft, who was so busy with the Union Carbide project that she "was practically alone on the design work" for the Pepsi-Cola Building. This assertion is supported by SOM founder Nathaniel Owings, who, in his 1973 autobiography, praises de Blois:

> *Her mind and hands worked marvels in design — and only she and God would ever know just how many great solutions, with the imprimatur of one of the male heroes of SOM, owed much more to her than was attributed by either SOM or the client.*[16]

Having worked for thirty years as one of the few women architects with any considerable level of responsibility, de Blois became an active member of the American Institute of Architects' Task Force on Women, helping to write an important report on the prejudices faced by women architects. Subsequently, she was hired as a senior project designer with the Houston firm of Neuhaus & Taylor, the founder of which, Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr., had a distinguished International Style education as a student of Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer and as a collaborator with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. De Blois became a professor at the University of Texas in Austin before her retirement.

The Other Members of the Project Team

The administrative partner associated with the Pepsi-Cola project was Robert Ward Cutler.[17] Cutler (b. 1905), a native of Pennsylvania, studied architecture at Syracuse University and joined the SOM firm in 1937, becoming a partner in 1945. He specialized in corporate and health-care facilities. Among his other projects were the New York University Medical Center (1952-61) and the Institute for Muscle Disease (1959). Cutler was active in many civic, professional, and social organizations. According to historian Carol Krinsky, Cutler was a gregarious man who could handle even the most difficult of clients, including his acquaintance, Alfred N. Steele, who had demanded that Pepsi-Cola dispensers be located in the lobby of his new building until Cutler prevailed. The project manager for the Pepsi-Cola Building was Albert Kennerly,[18] a member of the AIA since 1953. Job captain Herbert D. Warrington (b. 1916)[19] was educated at the Cooper Union and worked as a draftsman for the prominent firm of Harrison & Abramovitz before joining SOM in 1951. Engineering consultants were Severud-Elstad-Krueger Associates (structural), Slocum & Fuller (mechanical and electrical), and Bolt Beranek & Newman (acoustical).[20]

Design and Construction[21]

Pepsi's officers and their staff required a relatively small building, not unlike the commissions Bunshaft had received from Lever Brothers and Manufacturers Trust Company Bank. Bunshaft's commitment to precision complements perfectly the modest dimensions of the building — resulting in a bold, simple, and gemlike design (fig. 2). From the recessed core, expressed by the glazed ground-floor lobby and by the almost-hidden-from-view penthouses, project nine office floors sheathed in a curtain wall of aluminum spandrels and gray-green glass (figs. 3 and 4). The one-quarter-inch-thick spandrels, encaustic-etched and anodized aluminum sheets, are stiffened against the unsightly "oil-canning" which at the time of erection was often associated with metal-panel construction. The nine-by-thirteen-foot panes of polished plate glass (the largest size then available) were only one-half-inch thick. The glass was cushioned by neoprene glazing strips, then sealed and secured with mastic to minimize the width of surrounding frames. The resulting exterior was almost flush and its lack of high contrast in depth

or tone allowed it to appear as a thin, almost weightless screen. Polished aluminum mullions added a vertical balance to the horizontal bands of windows and spandrels and served as guide rails for the window-washing apparatus. The architectural press touted the exterior detailing for its technological innovation and refinement, which Bunshaft credited to job captain Warrington.

The East 59th Street facade was set back twenty feet from the building line (and thus from the adjacent hotel, now demolished, which stood to the west) and a recessed service core sheathed in black granite separated the curtain wall of the building's main mass from the taller masonry apartment building to the south. Those design solutions allowed the new headquarters to appear to stand free of its old-fashioned neighbors. Furthermore, the curtain wall of the office block seemed to float above the ground story: as the site slopes down towards the west, a raised plaza with trees, shrubs, and flagpoles provided a level base, the pre-cast stone pavement of which continued uninterruptedly into the building. Meanwhile, the smooth soffit beneath the cantilevered office block continued into the lobby to serve as a ceiling. In this way, the architects achieved a unity of exterior and interior space at the first level, defined by two continuous, horizontal parallel planes.

In accordance with the International Style tenet calling for visually and structurally unobstructed interior space, the interiors (fig. 5, not subject to this designation) of the Pepsi-Cola Building were interrupted by only eight columns set back from the exterior envelope. The ground-floor lobby, visible from the outside through walls of glass interrupted only by minimal mullions and two lighted revolving doors, provided a preview of the open floors above (fig. 6). Though designed to accommodate exhibits, the lobby was typically empty. The basement contained a health club and service areas. Floors two through ten were occupied by offices and the eleventh floor was divided into office space, a pantry, and a lounge. The whole interior was laid out on a ten-foot module that controlled the location of interior partitions, which were made of materials similar to those on the exterior. Partitions were capped with glazed strips, permitting exterior light to penetrate the interior sections of each floor. Vertical fabric window blinds — considered in several published accounts as part of the overall design — took on the appearance of auxiliary mullions (an effect which has been maintained). The open, gridded space was accentuated at night by the view from the street of uninterrupted planes of illuminated ceilings. (Fig. 7; this feature has been altered, see below.) The firm even designed all the furniture, to ensure a completely modern aesthetic.

The 100,000-square-foot building was built between August 1958 and February 1960 by the George A. Fuller Company and cost $7.8 million. A fitting monument to a decade of resurgence for the Pepsi-Cola Company, the structure was dedicated in early February 1960, during a four-day national convention, held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, which attracted about 2,000 Pepsi bottlers.

Critical Reaction

Three months after the dedication of the headquarters, the Municipal Art Society voted it the "Building of the Year" for its contribution to the beautification of the city.[22] Contemporary journals commented, "In the vicinity are such giants as Lever, Seagram and Union Carbide, but the simple design of Pepsi's eleven storeys allow [sic] it to stand out and completely hold its own"[23] and called it "the newest, smallest, and possibly the slickest corporate package in New York."[24] In 1964 the City Club of New York bestowed on the building its First Honor Award, identifying it as New York's best structure completed since 1960.[25] Architectural writers have continued to praise the design.[26] Former *New York Times* critic Ada Louise Huxtable puts Pepsi-Cola "at the top of the list, with Seagram and Lever House, of the city's few modern landmarks," and critic Paul Goldberger describes the building as an

> *elegant box of glass and aluminum, floating on piers but respectful of the street and of the scale of its neighbors. Like the Seagram Building, it is a jewel of metal and glass ..., one of the few instances of modern commercial architecture in New York succeeding at what it set out to do — create an elegant, refined, and civilized environment that would enrich the city at large.*

In his survey of modern architecture, John Jacobus calls it "[n]othing less than an exquisite silvery glass jewel box, this most restrained and perfect of all commercial buildings by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill ..." and guidebook authors and critics Norval White and Elliot Willensky emphasize the building's "understated elegance." Architect Sydney LeBlanc's recently published list of 200 key

buildings of twentieth-century America includes the Pepsi-Cola Building along with nine other designs by SOM.

Subsequent History[27]

During construction of its headquarters, Pepsi-Cola sold the property to the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company of Boston. Pepsi-Cola had occupied its headquarters for six years when the gallery located in the building offered a month-long exhibit, entitled "New Life for Landmarks," which illustrated, among other topics, the preservation of landmarks across the country and surveyed New York City Landmarks with proposals to save them. It is ironic, then, that in 1967 the company abandoned Park Avenue for a campus-like headquarters on 112 acres of the former Blind Brook Polo Club in Purchase, New York; president and chief executive officer Donald M. Kendall lived in nearby Greenwich, Connecticut.

In December 1967 the Olivetti Underwood Corporation signed a lease for the building. Founded in 1908 near Milan, Italy, as a typewriter manufacturer, the Olivetti company soon established an international reputation for its commitment to aesthetics and industrial philosophy, being involved in worker housing, community development, and publishing. The successful company later diversified its line of office products, and eventually acquired Underwood, the American typewriter manufacturer. At the time of its move into the former Pepsi-Cola Building, Olivetti had begun making electronic typewriters, banking terminals, telecommunications equipment, copying machines, and industrial-automation systems, including robots and precision machine tools. The company remained in the building until 1978, when it was nearly bankrupt. At that time the site (along with the adjacent Nassau Hotel) was acquired by real estate developer Peter Kalikow and others, and then by an investment concern called Securities Groups, which moved its offices into the top two floors.

SOM's building was greatly expanded in 1981-84 for its new owner, the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, incorporated in 1859 and for decades one of the nation's largest life insurance companies, which had diversified its interests into real estate development and securities brokerage. The addition (not on the Landmark site), called "500 Park Tower" and replacing the Nassau Hotel, was designed by the firm of James Stewart Polshek & Partners, in association with Schuman, Lichtenstein, Claman & Efron, and required a special permit from the City Planning Commission. The forty-one-story tower, clad in thermal finish gray-green granite, supports sections of cantilevered aluminum and glass, in homage to the original design. The lower twelve stories augment the space of the older building and the upper levels accommodate fifty-six residential condominium units. The sidewalk plaza of the corner site was repaved in granite to match the sidewalk in front of the new tower and to recall the material used for vertical surfaces in the original design. On the corner of the plaza, at 59th Street and Park Avenue, is a brushed stainless steel signage cube that identifies the building's current tenants and the building number. The cube, added in the early 1980's, is not part of the original design and does not contribute to the architectural significance of the building. The wall-mounted letters, identifying the current tenant, in the recessed bay facing Park Avenue, and the wall-mounted letters reading "500 Park Tower" on the polished granite wall at the west end of the plaza and adjacent to the tower were also added in the early 1980s and are not part of the original design. The lettering on the cube has changed over time; it is anticipated that the lettering will continue to change as different tenants occupy the building.

In addition, the ground floor of the original building was subdivided, and some bays slightly altered, to accommodate changing tenants. The ground floor now includes retail uses. The ground floor building facade and the ground floor retail tenant spaces bear the tenants' signage, both above the entrances and on the glass of the facade. The current retail signage is not part of the original design. The signage has changed over time; it is anticipated that the signage will continue to change as different tenants occupy the retail spaces. Each of the current retail spaces is served by its own entrance. The revolving doors and glazed double doors at bays 4 and 13 are not original.[28]

Above the ground story, the original luminous ceiling of acrylic plastic, no longer manufactured, was replaced by a white plaster ceiling with one new lighting fixture per bay, a solution which reinforces the original rhythm of the building as seen from the exterior. (The interiors are not subject to this designation.) Currently, the original building is occupied by a branch of the ABN-Amro Bank; that institution is the result of merger of two

banks: the Algemene Bank Nederlands (ABN), its roots dating back to the early nineteenth century and historically Holland's most internationally oriented bank, had first appeared in New York in 1981, and the Amsterdam-Rotterdam (Amro) Bank, formerly the leader in the Dutch domestic market and the principal rival of the ABN. The remainder of the enlarged office structure houses the Walt Disney Company, a gigantic force in the entertainment industry, which was incorporated in 1938 and has experienced a creative and financial renaissance since the mid-1980s.

Description

The largely intact eleven-story building exterior consists of a ground story, in which the interior lobby (not included in this designation) and plaza are unified; a nine-story office block, cantilevered from ten columns; an eleventh-story executive penthouse set back the same distances from the office block as the ground floor; and an even further recessed penthouse for mechanical systems and water tower.

The granite paving of the plaza (altered in 1981-84) extends out to the curb of both streets. Due to the slope of the site, the plaza is level with the sidewalk along Park Avenue, but is four risers above the sidewalk at the western end of the East 59th Street side. At that location stands a granite projection supporting two brushed stainless-steel flagpoles and a metal canopy (installed in the 1980s, its silver-painted "I"-section supports are shielded by a canvas roof). The granite paving turns up to become a low bulkhead for the glazed walls of the ground story. Glass is framed in stainless steel, which is then set within black metal frames; the rhythm of the original bays is consonant with the modular character of the overall design throughout the building. One original revolving door survives, at bay 11; its cylindrical aluminum housing features a curved light above a glazed door. The two other revolving doors (one for a ground-story tenant at bay 4, the other serving the tower in part at bay 13) are not original. Although they are similar in design, they omit the overhead light panels and adjacent mullions and differ in their metal hardware. The building's signage — on the brushed stainless-steel cube at the corner of the plaza, on the walls adjacent to the tower entrance and above the Park Avenue service entrance, and on the inside of the glass — identifies the current tenants and the building's address. On the Park Avenue facade, the two columns which are not enclosed within the ground story are clad in aluminum and have granite reveals at the top and bottom of their ground-story segments.

The nine-story curtain walls of the office block feature one-quarter-inch-thick encaustic-etched and anodized aluminum spandrels and nine-by-thirteen-foot panes of polished gray-green plate glass of one-half-inch thickness. The five-bay Park Avenue facade and nine-bay East 59th Street facade are further articulated by polished aluminum "I"-section mullions framing each bay. (Windows retain the fabric-covered vertical blinds — not included in this designation — according to the original design.) At the south end of the Park Avenue facade, a recessed granite-clad wall accommodates paired, unadorned service doors at the ground story and recessed balconies at the upper levels.

The curtain walls terminate in a pipe-rail balustrade, behind which are a landscaped roof terrace and the glazed walls of the executive penthouse. Above its aluminum fascia, that level is crowned by another railing and a further recessed, largely louvered structure for the mechanical systems. The western end of the mechanical penthouse is capped by a traditional water tower. (Areas above the curtain walls are not easily seen from the street below.)

Report prepared by David M. Breiner,
with contributions by Gale Harris,
Research Department

NOTES

1. *Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx* (New York, 1885), pl. 18; *Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1899-1909), vol. 2, pl. 44 and vol. 3, pl. 19; *Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1926-61), vol. 2, pl. 48 and vol. 3, pl. 19; I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island* (New York, 1915-28) vol. V, 1531-32, 1669,

1679, 1711, 1853, 1907, 1915, 1927, 1949; Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Lever House Designation Report*, report prepared by Alex Herrera (New York: City of New York, 1982), 3, and Christopher Gray, "Is It Time to Redevelop Park Avenue Again?" *New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*), sec. 13, May, 14, 1989, pp. 44-47. See also: Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890-1915* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 351-58; Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), passim; Moses King, *King's Handbook of New York*, 2nd ed. (New York: Moses King, 1893), 942-43; New York Public Library, *Photographic Views of New York City, 1870's-1970's* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1981), fiche 0947 and 0948; *Manhattan Land Book, City of New York* (New York: G.W. Bromley, 1934), pls. 84, 104.

2. These included the National Panorama (at the southeast corner of Madison Avenue and East 59th Street), the Progress Club (East 59th Street, east of Park Avenue), the Liederkranz Hall (East 58th Street, east of Park Avenue), and the Arion Hall (a/k/a Männergesangverein Arion (1887), southeast corner of Park Avenue and East 59th Street).

3. The Deutsche Theatre replaced the National Panorama; the Progress Club gave way to the Fidelio Club.

4. See "High Rise Office Buildings," *Progressive Architecture* 38 (June 1957), 162, and *Insurance Maps of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan*, vols. 4, 6E (New York: Sanborn, 1920-present).

5. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Block Index of Re-Indexed Conveyances, Block 1294, [original] lots 37-41. "$2,000,000 Is Paid for City Building," *NYT*, June 13, 1956, p.34. Later occupants of the building included the Board of Higher Education, Department of Commerce and Public Events, Veterans Bureau, Civil Defense, and Convention and Visitors Bureau.

6. "Pepsi-Cola Company," *NYT*, Mar. 31, 1954, p.43; Richard Rutter, "No Question About It; Pepsi-Cola Has Bounce," *NYT*, Feb. 7, 1956, p.39; "Pepsi-Cola Lifts Earnings by 52%," *NYT*, Mar. 28, 1956, p.41; "Pepsi-Cola to Build Here," *NYT*, Jan. 21, 1958, p.48; "Architects Urged to Plan Suburbs," *NYT*, July 10, 1958, p.45; Alfred Steele obituary, *NYT*, Apr. 20, 1959, p.31; Clare M. Reckert, "Pepsi-Cola Gain Leads Industry," *NYT*, Jan. 31, 1960, sect. 3, p.13. H.E. Priestley, *1898: A Fascinating Glimpse of Victorian Times* ([London?:] Threadneedle Press for Pepsi-Cola, 1973), 9-16, 44-48; Walter Mack, *No Time Lost* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 117-177; Roger Enrico and Jesse Kornbluth, *The Other Guy Blinked: How Pepsi Won the Cola Wars* (New York: Bantam, 1986), 17-20; "PepsiCo, Inc.," *International Directory of Company Histories*, vol. I, ed. Thomas Derdak (Chicago-London: St. James Press, 1988), 276-279; Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 256-260.

7. This section is adapted from research done by Gale Harris of the LPC. On the International Style see Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (1932; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton, 1966); William H. Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1976); Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971). For the Pepsi-Cola Building in the context of New York architecture, see Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: Monacelli, 1995), 336-338 and 1246, n. 35.

8. Among the pioneers of this new style were the French-Swiss architect, Le Corbusier, the Germans Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and the Dutch architects, J.J.P. Oud and Gerrit Rietveld. For the most part their early works executed during the 1920s were private houses, industrial buildings, and low-cost housing projects. Among the other European architects whose work was represented in the exhibition were E.G. Asplund, Erich Mendelsohn, and Alvar Aalto. Of the handful of works by Americans, the most prominent were Richard Neutra's Lovell House (1927-29) in Los Angeles, Hood & Fouilhoux's McGraw-Hill Building (1929-31) in New York City, and Howe & Lescaze's PSFS Building (1929-32) in Philadelphia.

9. Hitchcock and Johnson, 41.

10. This section is adapted from research done by Gale Harris and is based on William E. Hartmann, "S.O.M. Organization," *Bauen + Wohnen* 11 (Apr. 1957), 116-117; Susan Strauss, "Skidmore, Owings & Merrill," and Donald Martin Reynolds, "Gordon Bunshaft" in the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Adolf K. Placzek, ed.

(New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., Free Press, 1982); Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (Cambridge: MIT, 1988); LPC, *Lever House Designation Report*; and Gordon Bunshaft's obituaries in *Newsday*, Aug. 9, 1990, p. 28, and in *NYT*, Aug. 8, 1990, sect. A, p. 1, and sect. D, p. 21.

11. Strauss, 78.

12. Bunshaft obit., *NYT*, sect. D, p. 21.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Judith Paine, "Natalie de Blois," *Women in American Architecture* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977), 112-114; "The New Professional: Coming of Age," *Progressive Architecture* 58 (Mar. 1977), 48; *Built by Women: A Guide to Architecture in the New York Area* (New York: Alliance for Women in Architecture, 1981), nos. 18, 24; Hugo V. Neuhaus, Jr., obituary, *Cite: a Publication of the Rice Design Alliance* (Winter, 1987), 19-20; C. Ray Smith, *Interior Design in 20th-Century America: A History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 186; Krinsky, *Gordon Bunshaft*, 141, 335-336; Judith Edelman, "Task Force on Women: The AIA Responds to a Growing Presence," *Architecture. A Place for Women*, ed. Ellen Perry Berkeley (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 117-124.

15. Anne Patterson, "Women Architects: Why So Few of Them?" *Inland Architect* 15 (Dec. 1971), 14, 16.

16. Nathaniel Ownings, *The Spaces in Between: An Architect's Journey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 264-265.

17. *American Architects Directory*, ed. George S. Koyl, 2nd ed. (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1962), 149; "Cutler, Robert Ward," *Who's Who in America*, vol. 37 (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Co., 1971-72), 717; Krinsky, 65.

18. *American Architects Directory*, 2nd ed., 374.

19. *American Architects Directory*, 2nd ed., 740.

20. "Pepsi's Palace," *Architectural Forum* 112 (Mar. 1960), 104.

21. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1294, Lot 37. NB 11-1958. Columbia University, Avery Library, Drawings and Archives Collection: Bunshaft Collection, Series III, Photos, Projects and Personal - Pepsi-Cola Company, NY, NY, 3:20 (1960). Reckert, 13; "Pepsi-Cola Headquarters, New York, USA," *Architectural Design* 32 (Feb. 1962), 79-[82]; "Pepsi-Cola Dedicates Home," *NYT*, Feb. 2, 1960, p.56; "Pepsi's Palace," *Architectural Forum* 112 (Mar. 1960), 102-108; "Pepsi-Cola Hauptverwaltung in New York," *Bauen + Wohnen* 16 (Oct. 1962), 417-422; *Architecture of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1950-1962*, text by Ernst Danz (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 118-119.

22. Sanka Knox, "Art Society Cites Aide of 48 Years," *NYT*, May 19, 1960, p.5.

23. "Pepsi-Cola Headquarters," 79.

24. "Pepsi's Palace," 103. As early as 1962, the German periodical *Bauen + Wohnen* placed the Pepsi-Cola Building in the same laudable group as Lever House and the Seagram Building; "Büroturmhaus der Union Carbide Corporation in New York," *Bauen + Wohnen* 16 (Jan. 1962), 28-34.

25. Ada Louise Huxtable, "Civic Club Honors Private Building," *NYT*, Mar. 17, 1964, p. 32.

26. Ada Louise Huxtable, "500 Park — A Skillful Solution," *NYT*, May 3, 1981, real estate sect., pp. 1, 31. Soon after the building's completion, Huxtable noted in *Four Walking Tours of Modern Architecture in New York City* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1961), 26, that, "... by its extreme simplicity, austerity and careful detailing, the Pepsi-Cola Building asserts its presence with quiet dignity and pride." Paul Goldberger, *The City Observed: New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 154-155; John Jacobus, *Twentieth-Century Architecture: The Middle Years 1940-65* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 108-110; Norval White and Elliot Willensky, AIA Guide to New York City, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 283-284; Sydney LeBlanc, *Whitney Guide. 20th Century American Architecture: 200 Key Buildings* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1992), 109 and passim.

27. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 5054, p. 519; "An Exhibition of Landmarks Opens at Pepsi-Cola Gallery," *NYT*, Feb. 5, 1966, p.20; "Pepsi-Cola Planning to Leave City for Westchester," *NYT*, Jan. 11, 1967, pp. 1, 19; "American Can Co. Will Leave City," *NYT*, Feb. 16, 1967, pp. 1, 25.

    Regarding Olivetti Underwood, see Jonathan Martin, "Olivetti / Ing. C. Olivetti & C., S.P.A.," *International Directory of Company Histories*, vol. III, ed. Adele Hast (Chicago-London: St. James Press, 1991), 144-146.

    Regarding the addition: NYC, City Planning Commission, Special Permit C810543ZSM (A), Calendar #65, and Item N810537ZRM, Calendar #66, both November 18, 1981; NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1294, Lots 37 and 42. ALT 1225-1981 and Certificate of Occupancy 86078; "Equitable Buys Building ...," *NYT*, Oct. 11, 1981, sect. VIII, p. 1; Huxtable, 1, 31; Lee A. Daniels, "Park Ave. Luxury Is Attracting Buyers," *NYT*, Mar. 4, 1983, sect. II, p. 7; Carter Wiseman, "Setting New Standards for Sensitive Innovation on Park Avenue," *New York*, Sept. 19, 1983; Paul Goldberger, "Defining Luxury in New York's New Apartments," *NYT*, August 16, 1984; Cervin Robinson, "Contextual Tower Rises Above a '50s Classic," *Architecture: the AIA Journal* 75 (May 1986), 206-209; telephone conversation with James Stewart Polshek, Sept. 9, 1994.

    For the current owner and occupants, see Douglas Sun, "The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States," *International Directory of Company Histories*, vol. III, 247-248; "Algemene Bank Nederland, N.V.," and "Amro Bank," *International Directory of Company Histories*, vol. II, ed. Lisa Mirabile (Chicago-London: St. James Press, 1990), 183-186; and "Walt Disney Company," vol. IV, ed. Paula Kepos (Detroit-Washington, D.C.-London: St. James Press, 1992), 174.

28. For the purposes of this report, the building's bays are numbered sequentially, beginning with the southern (service) bay on Park Avenue and concluding with the western bay on East 59th Street.

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 (former) Pepsi-Cola Building has a special character, 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) Pepsi-Cola Building is one of a prestigious group of sleek, understated International Style monuments to corporate America which stand along Park Avenue; that the building is among the finest works of the respected firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and was created under the guidance of Gordon Bunshaft, design partner, by Natalie de Blois, senior designer, who had a ground-breaking career in a field dominated by male colleagues; that the Pepsi-Cola Building has been praised consistently by architectural critics for its superb design, innovative technology, sensitive siting, gemlike treatment, and especially its sophisticated curtain wall; that the curtain wall is a nearly smooth skin of gray-green glass and aluminum spandrels, accented by attached mullions which serve to create visual interest; that the building's siting and detailing were chosen to make it appear as a freestanding, boxlike volume, detached from its older neighbors, in keeping with the preferences of International Style architects; that the structure was commissioned as a corporate symbol of architectural distinction following the astounding success achieved by the Pepsi-Cola Company during the 1950s; that the building's later occupants similarly have been important businesses, including the Olivetti Underwood Corporation and the ABN-Amro Bank; and that, despite the addition of a mixed-use tower on the adjacent East 59th Street site (not included in this designation), the original SOM-designed structure remains largely intact.

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) Pepsi-Cola Building, 500 Park Avenue, a/k/a 62 East 59th Street, and designates as its Landmark Site Manhattan Tax Map Block 1294, Lot 37.

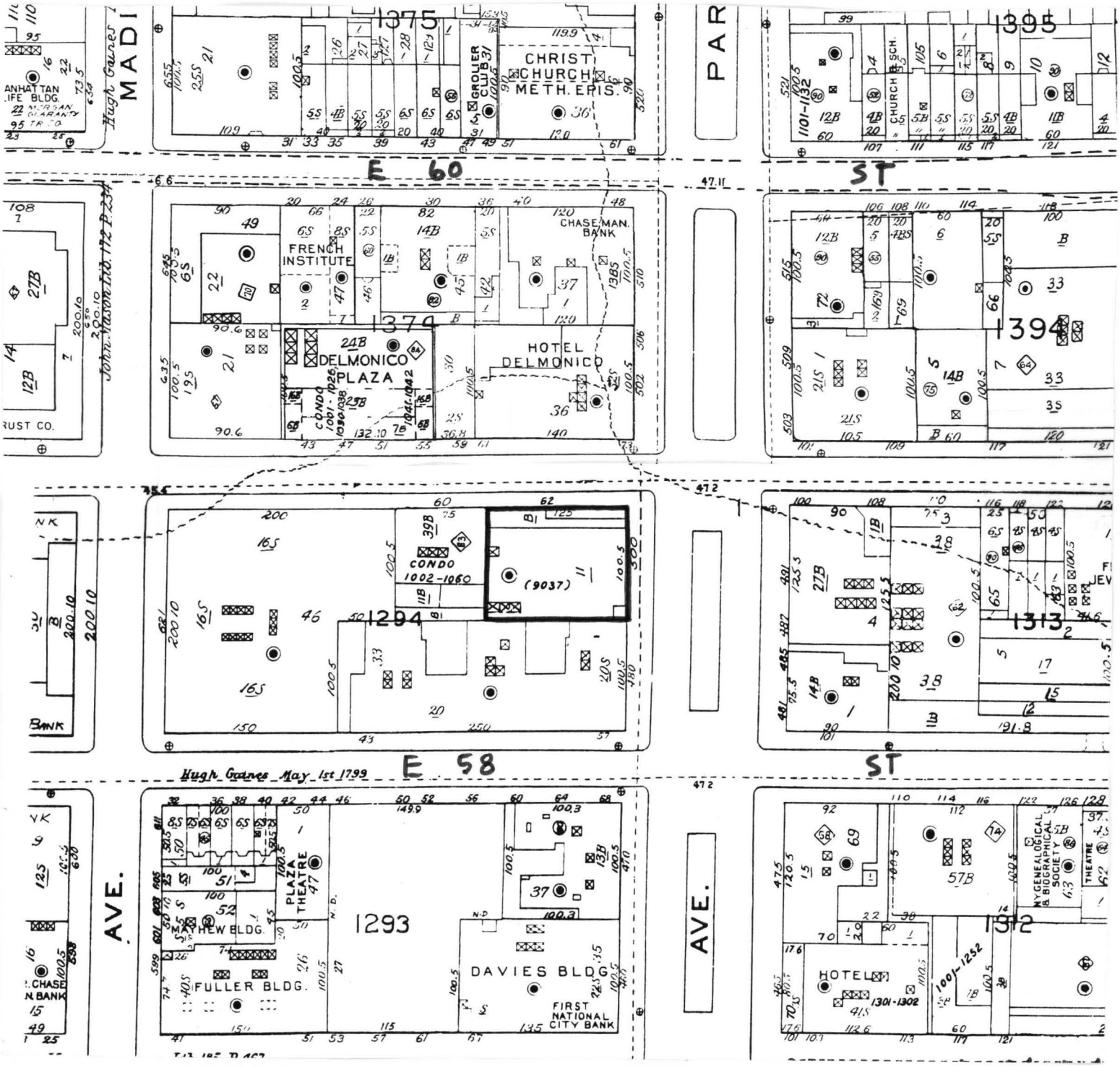


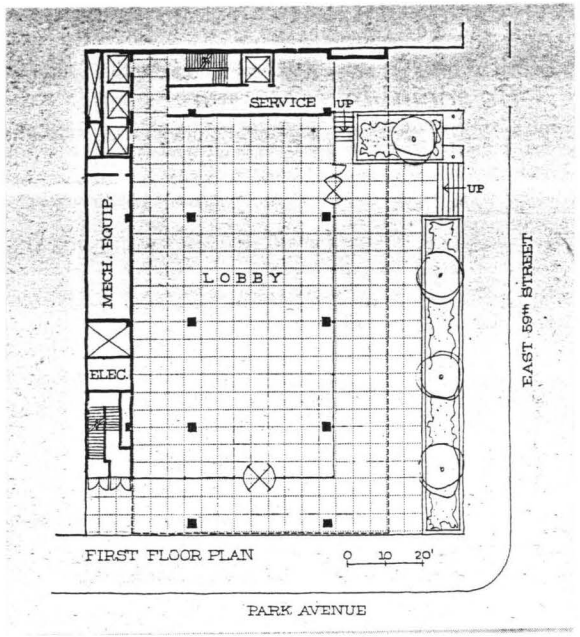
Fig. 1: (Former) Pepsi-Cola Building, 500 Park Avenue, Manhattan

Landmark Site: Manhattan Tax Map Block 1294, Lot 37.
Graphic Source: *Sanborn Manhattan Land Book* (1993-94), pls. 84, 104.

Fig. 2: (Former) Pepsi-Cola Building, photo of exterior (DMB)

Fig. 3: detail of curtain wall (DMB)

Fig. 4: detail of mullion, soffit, and column (DMB)
(Former) Pepsi-Cola Building



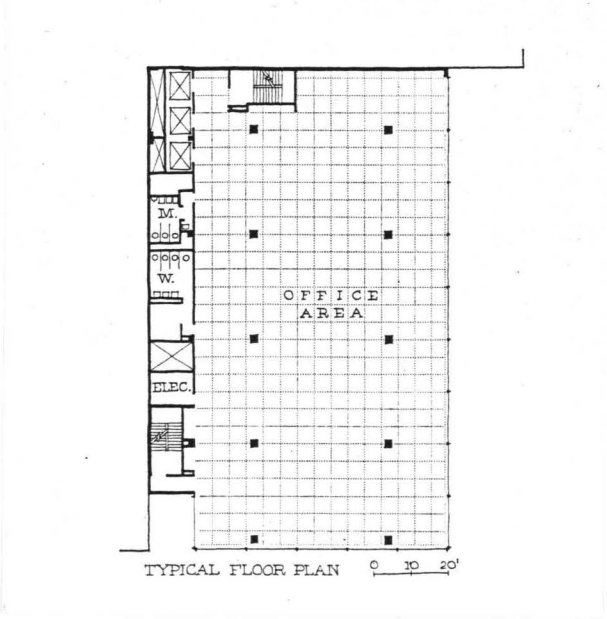


Fig. 5: (Former) Pepsi-Cola Building, original plans
Graphic Source: "Pepsi's Palace," *Architectural Forum* 112 (Mar. 1960), 104, 106

Figs. 6 and 7: (Former) Pepsi-Cola Building, historic nighttime photos
(Columbia University, Avery Library, Drawings and Archives Collection: Bunshaft Collection, Series III, Photos, Projects and Personal - Pepsi-Cola Company, NY, NY, 3:20 (1960): J. Alex Langley, unnumbered (left), and anonymous [probably Langley], no. E8 / #14 (right))

(Former) Pepsi-Cola Building

Fig. 8: detail of first story, Park Avenue facade (DMB)
Fig. 9: view of first story, East 59th St. facade (DMB)