

# PLAZA HOTEL INTERIOR

## Designation Report



**New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission**  
July 12, 2005  
Designation List 366  
LP-2174

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## **PLAZA HOTEL INTERIOR**

Plaza Hotel, **ground floor interior** consisting of the Fifth Avenue vestibules, Lobby, corridor to the east of the Palm Court, the Palm Court, Terrace Room, corridor to the north of the Palm Court connecting to the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and the Oak Room, foyers to the Edwardian Room from the corridor to the north of the Palm Court and the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby, the Edwardian Room, 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and vestibule, the Oak Room and the Oak Bar, corridor to the east of the Oak Room, corridor to the south of the Palm Court, and the staircases connecting the ground floor to the mezzanine floor; **mezzanine floor interior** consisting of the Terrace Room Corridor, Mezzanine Foyer, Terrace Room balcony, Terrace Room and fountain, and the staircase connecting the mezzanine floor to the first floor Grand Ballroom Foyer; **first floor interior** consisting of the Grand Ballroom Foyer, Grand Ballroom Corridor, Grand Ballroom and stage, and Grand Ballroom boxes; and the fixtures and the interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces and floor surfaces, murals, mirrors, chandeliers, all lighting fixtures, attached furnishings, doors, exterior elevator doors and grilles, railings and balustrades, decorative metalwork and attached decorative elements; 768 Fifth Avenue and 2 Central Park South, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1905-07; 1919-22; 1929; architects Henry Janeway Hardenbergh, Warren & Wetmore, and Schultze & Weaver.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1274, Lot 25.

On June 7, 2005, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Plaza Hotel, ground floor interior consisting of the Fifth Avenue vestibules, Lobby, corridor to the east of the Palm Court, the Palm Court, Terrace Room, corridor to the north of the Palm Court connecting to the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and the Oak Room, foyers to the Edwardian Room from the corridor to the north of the Palm Court and the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby, the Edwardian Room, 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and vestibule, the Oak Room and the Oak Bar, corridor to the east of the Oak Room, corridor to the south of the Palm Court, and the staircases connecting the ground floor to the mezzanine floor; mezzanine floor interior consisting of the Terrace Room Corridor, Mezzanine Foyer, Terrace Room balcony, Terrace Room and fountain, and the staircase connecting the mezzanine floor to the first floor Grand Ballroom Foyer; first floor interior consisting of the Grand Ballroom Foyer, Grand Ballroom Corridor, Grand Ballroom and stage, and Grand Ballroom boxes; and the fixtures and the interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces and floor surfaces, murals, mirrors, chandeliers, all lighting fixtures, attached furnishings, doors, exterior elevator doors and grilles, railings and balustrades, decorative metalwork and attached decorative elements; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing was continued to June 28, 2005 (Item No. 1). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-two people spoke in favor of designation, including the owner, State Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried, the Chairman of the Landmarks Committee of Community Board 5 and representatives of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Landmarks Conservancy, the Preservation Committee of the Municipal Art Society, Historic Districts Council, the Beaux Arts Alliance, Friends of the Upper East Side, the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, Society for the Architecture of the City, East 85<sup>th</sup> – East 86<sup>th</sup> Streets Park to Lexington Avenue Block Association, Landmark West!, Defenders of the Historic Upper East Side, Place Matters, the Real Estate Board of New York, and the New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council. Several people requested that the designation include additional rooms. In addition the Commission has received hundreds of communications in support of designation, including letters from the Northeast Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Preservation League of New York State, the Women's City Club of New York, several architects and architectural historians, and members of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade class of Cider Mill School, Wilton, Connecticut.

## Summary

The Plaza Hotel, one of the world's great hotels since it opened in 1907, is located on a prominent site overlooking Central Park, Grand Army Plaza and Fifth Avenue. In 1971 *The New York Times* architecture critic, Ada Louise Huxtable, called it "New York's most celebrated symbol of cosmopolitan and turn-of-the-century splendor, inside and out."<sup>1</sup> The exterior has been a beloved designated New York City Landmark since 1969. The eight major publicly accessible rooms as well as the adjacent corridors, vestibules, stairways and foyers are largely a result of four different campaigns: Henry Hardenbergh's original design of 1905-07; the 1919-1921 renovation and addition by Warren & Wetmore; Schultze & Weaver's ballroom from 1929; and Conrad Hilton's renovation of the building when he acquired it in 1943. Hardenbergh, Warren & Wetmore and Schultze & Weaver were three significant early twentieth-century American architectural firms which were pre-eminent hotel designers. The Plaza Hotel is one of Henry Hardenbergh's most famous and critically acclaimed buildings. Hardenbergh set standards for the design of luxury American hotels on the exterior and interior of his buildings. The Plaza Hotel interiors are rare surviving examples of Hardenbergh's interior designs in New York City and represent his spatially sophisticated planning and mastery of historical revival styles. The Beaux-Arts style 59th Street Lobby and Main Corridor feature strikingly veined and carefully matched stonework in white and Breccia marble. The German Renaissance Revival style Oak Room features wood paneling with elaborate carvings on the west wall, murals of medieval castles and a coved plaster ceiling. The Spanish Renaissance Revival style Edwardian Room features a paneled wood wainscoting and an elaborate trussed ceiling with carved bosses, stenciled decorations and mirrors. The neo-Classical style Palm Court features walls faced with Caen stone and accented with a giant order of highly polished marble pilasters, a colonnade of marble columns separating the space from the main corridor and marble caryatids representing the Four Seasons on the west wall. The 1921 addition by Warren & Wetmore includes the neo-Classical style Fifth Avenue Lobby and neo-Renaissance style Terrace Room. The firm was known for its hotel interiors, which accommodated the expanding social demands of well-to-do Americans by providing vast halls for promenading, lounging and public dining. The Terrace Room features painted decorations by noted interior decorator John Smeraldi, and different levels of space, while its foyer features pilasters with ornate capitals and a richly decorated coffered ceiling. These spaces are rare extant examples in New York City of Warren & Wetmore's hotel interiors. Schultze & Weaver's 1929 Grand Ballroom represents the work of one of America's significant hotel designers and its mastery of revival styles. The neo-Classical style room features attached Ionic columns and an elaborate coved ceiling. The Plaza Operating Company owned the current building and its predecessor from 1902 to 1943 and the Plaza was managed by noted hotelier Frederic Sterry from 1905 to 1932. In 1943 the hotel was acquired by the Atlas Corporation, which was affiliated with famed hotelier Conrad Hilton, who owned the building until 1953. Hilton opened the Tudor Revival style Oak Bar and commissioned Everett Shinn to paint three murals specifically for the space in 1945. The hotel's current owner acquired the property in August 2004. From its opening in 1907 the Plaza Hotel's public spaces have been used by its guests as well as the general public including the thousands of people who took tea at the Palm Court and habitués, such as George Cohan, of the Oak Room. The Terrace Room has been used for receptions and press conferences including that of Marilyn Monroe and Laurence Olivier. The Grand Ballroom has been the site of benefits, weddings and dances, most notably Truman Capote's 1966 Black and White Ball. In 1975 *The New York Times*, in an editorial calling for the designation of the Plaza's publicly accessible spaces, described the interiors as "among the most splendid public spaces in the city."<sup>2</sup>

### Fifth Avenue and the Site<sup>3</sup>

For most of the nineteenth century, successive portions of Fifth Avenue enjoyed the reputation of being New York's most prestigious residential street. As the Avenue was developed northward from Washington Square, its character reflected the growth and change of Manhattan with newer, northerly, residential sections followed closely by commercial redevelopment. After the Civil War, Fifth Avenue between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> Streets was built up with town houses and mansions for New York's elite, yet by the turn of the century profound commercial change had occurred. One writer in 1907 commented that "among the many radical changes which have been brought about during the past six years in New York City, the most radical and the most significant are those which have taken place on Fifth Avenue. That thoroughfare has been completely transformed."<sup>4</sup> Fifth Avenue became an elegant boulevard of prestigious retail shops, department stores, luxury hotels, and elite social clubs, as well as the center of American fashion. In the vicinity of the Plaza Hotel are the St. Regis Hotel (1901-04, Trowbridge & Livingston; 1927, Sloan & Robertson), 699-703 Fifth Avenue; University Club (1896-1900, McKim, Mead & White), 1 West 54<sup>th</sup> Street; and Gotham Hotel (1902-05, Hiss & Weekes), 696-700 Fifth Avenue (all designated New York City Landmarks).

The City of New York subdivided the land that is now the Plaza Hotel site into lots and began selling them off in 1853.<sup>5</sup> The parcels were transferred several times before a John Anderson purchased and slowly assembled the site between 1870 and 1881.<sup>6</sup> Accounts differ as to what occupied the Plaza site, some situate the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Pond, site of the New York Skating Club, on the Plaza site, while an 1879 aerial perspective shows the land as vacant.<sup>7</sup> According to the *Real Estate Record and Guide* the first serious attempt to improve the property occurred in 1882, when Jared Flagg headed a syndicate of investors planning to build a twelve-story apartment house laid out by his son, architect Ernest Flagg, with exteriors designed by architect William Potter.<sup>8</sup> Flagg's plans did not materialize and, in 1883, the property was acquired by James Campbell and John Duncan Phyfe who hired architect Carl Pfeiffer to design a nine-story apartment hotel.<sup>9</sup> Construction began in 1883, but it is not known how much of the building was constructed.<sup>10</sup> In 1888, the New York Life Insurance Company acquired the property and hired McKim, Mead & White to substantially alter and complete the building as a hotel. The eight-story tall building was a brick and brownstone Renaissance-Revival style structure.<sup>11</sup> The building featured an up-to-date ventilation system and electrical plant and had luxuriously decorated public rooms. The 1893 *King's Handbook of New York* described the new building as "one of the most attractive public houses in the wide world," and praised its location in one of the city's most "aristocratic" neighborhoods and across from a main entrance to Central Park.<sup>12</sup>

### Construction and Opening of the Plaza Hotel<sup>13</sup>

During the 1890s the Plaza Hotel was a fashionable but remote address; by 1900 it was a pivotal location linking the shopping district of Fifth Avenue, the well-to-do residential neighborhood of the Upper East Side and the pleasures of Central Park. Bernhard Beinecke, a former meat wholesaler with connections to the hotel industry, and Harry S. Black, of the Fuller Construction Corporation and United States Realty and Construction Corporation, realized the site's potential and purchased it in 1902.<sup>14</sup> Beinecke and Black examined a number of options for the site, including adding to the older building. Its foundations, however, would not support any additional stories. The two started to plan for a new building, but lacking the necessary financing, Beinecke and Black approached John Gates, one of the wealthiest men in the United States who had made his fortune on barbed wire patents. He agreed to back the project with one stipulation, that Fred Sterry be hired as the hotel's managing director. Demolition of the old hotel commenced in June 1905 and two months later the site was cleared and construction had started on the new building.<sup>15</sup> Originally planned to cost \$8,500,000, the hotel ultimately cost \$12,500,000 to construct and furnish.<sup>16</sup> The new Plaza Hotel officially opened on October 1, 1907, with Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt the first guest to sign the register.<sup>17</sup> The hotel's

management intended the 753 rooms to be used by 550 guests, of which over half would be permanent, and included Gates, Vanderbilt, George J. Gould and Col. William Jay.<sup>18</sup>

### Hotel Architecture<sup>19</sup>

Hotels have played an important role in the life of the city since the earliest taverns and inns of New Amsterdam dispensed food, drink, lodging and entertainment to colonial travelers. For many years the Astor House, built in 1836 by Isaiah Rogers, on Broadway between Barclay and Vesey Street, provided the utmost in comfort and convenience to its guests. Not only was the building large, but it was equipped with the latest facilities, including a bath and toilet on every floor. As the population moved northward, so did the hotel district. By 1859, the Fifth Avenue Hotel, called the “first modern New York Hotel,”<sup>20</sup> opened on Madison Square, offering its patrons amenities such as New York’s first passenger elevator and luxuriously decorated interiors. As the nineteenth century progressed, hotels competed in size and grandeur. Perhaps the ultimate in nineteenth-century hotel splendor was exemplified by the Waldorf and the Astoria Hotels (which functioned as one hotel and was designed by Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1893 and 1897, demolished), which had 1,300 bedrooms and 40 public rooms, all lavishly and individually decorated.

The Waldorf and Astoria complex was perhaps the largest, but it was certainly not unique among the grand hotels of the late nineteenth century. Fostered by economic prosperity, the large luxury hotels of this period became the venue for public life, supplying halls for promenading, dining rooms to be seen in, and private rooms in which to entertain and be entertained.<sup>21</sup> Improvements in transportation during the late nineteenth century made travel between and within cities easier, and people became more mobile, traveling for pleasure as well as business. In addition, hotels enhanced their sense of luxury by offering the latest technological advancements, including electricity, elevators, telephones, and central heat. By the turn of the century it was observed that hotels tended to “include within the walls of the building all the possible comforts of modern life, facilities which formerly could be found only outside of the hotel walls. Telephones, Turkish baths, private nurses, physicians...”<sup>22</sup> in addition to laundry, the services of maids and valets, barbers, and shoe shine boys. A huge staff was required to supply all these services, and this in turn, necessitated a huge building to make the whole enterprise financially sound.<sup>23</sup> Many hotel guests were in residence for lengthy periods of time, preferring not to be saddled with the responsibility of maintaining a large private home or being visitors who came to New York City on an annual basis for a lengthy stay.

The Waldorf and Astoria Hotels proved to be exemplars of hotel design on the exterior as well. Not only did Hardenbergh follow his own design precedents in his later, influential hotel designs, but other architects (such as Clinton & Russell in the Hotel Astor) did as well. A. C. David, writing in 1905, proclaimed that the new, large hotels which were appearing in most cities in the United States were “in a different class architecturally from any similar buildings which have preceded them.” This new type was large, tall (i.e. built with steel-frame construction), but nonetheless was created “in such a manner that it would be distinguished from the office-building and suggest some relation to domestic life.”<sup>24</sup>

The St. Regis Hotel (1901-04, Trowbridge & Livingston) continued the technological innovations of the Waldorf and Astoria Hotels but provided a more exclusive and refined environment. Built out of limestone, employing a tripartite design and the Beaux-Arts style, the St. Regis echoed the pale color and classical style of Fifth Avenue’s private residences. In contrast to the Waldorf and Astoria, which “provides exclusiveness for the masses,” the St. Regis sought “the patronage of people who were rich, and who were or wanted to be fashionable, but which also would be somewhat quieter and more exclusive.”<sup>25</sup> The Plaza Hotel combined the two traditions appearing to blend in with the color and style of its neighboring Fifth Avenue mansions, but providing public spaces that immensely popular.

World War I and an economic recession in the early 1920s limited new building activity in New York City for several years.<sup>26</sup> Stylistically, this was a transitional period, with the Building Zone Regulation of 1916 requiring setbacks that resulted in simplified, geometrically massed buildings. Architects still clad these buildings with traditional, historically inspired motifs but simplified the decorative elements and stretched the spaces between them. New York City hotels took on even greater social significance in the late 1910s and early 1920s due to the difficulty of retaining the numerous servants needed to make a grand household function, and the closing of large-scale restaurant complexes such as Delmonico's and Rector's. The 1920 prohibition on alcoholic beverages, however, had a major impact on hotel economics and some hotel public spaces. H. I. Brock wrote: "the life of the lobby—the public rooms for dining and meeting people—ceased. . . Conviviality was not extinguished, but it was compressed."<sup>27</sup>

#### Frederic Sterry (1866-1933)<sup>28</sup>

Called one of the most "celebrated hoteliers" in the country, Frederic (Fred) Sterry was born in 1866 in Lansingburg, New York. His career in the hotel business began at the United States Hotel in Saratoga Springs, New York. His next position was the manager of the Lakewood Hotel in Lakewood, New Jersey, and by 1893 Sterry was the managing director of the Homestead Hotel in Hot Springs, Virginia. According to *The New York Times* it was due to Sterry's "able and tactful direction, his skillful handling of its special problems," that the Homestead attracted wealthy visitors from throughout the United States and Europe. At the Homestead, Sterry attracted the attention of Henry M. Flagler, who persuaded Sterry, in 1895, to also manage the Royal Ponciana and Breakers Hotels, both in Palm Beach, Florida. The managing director filled a critical role in early twentieth-century American hotels, *Architectural Record* noted: "In designing a hotel the manager, who as a rule obtains a long lease on the premises, becomes, for the architect the real client, although he may not have any real ownership in the building. It is he who is to make the investment profitable for the owner or owners, and who must therefore exercise almost dictatorial power. . .to secure the most suitable and economic conditions for the operation."<sup>29</sup> Sterry selected most of the furniture, linens, and tableware for the Plaza (which included buying trips to Europe), handled the publicity, supervised a staff of hundreds, dealt with guests and planned important entertainments at the hotel.<sup>30</sup> Sterry managed the Plaza from the time of its opening until 1932, when he was forced to take a leave of absence due to ill health. Sterry was associated with many leading hotels. He continued to manage the Palm Beach hotels as well as the Savoy-Plaza across the street from the Plaza in New York City, the Copley Plaza in Boston and the National Hotel in Havana, Cuba. He also consulted on the management of the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia.

#### Henry Janeway Hardenbergh (1847-1918)<sup>31</sup>

Born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, of Dutch lineage, Henry Janeway Hardenbergh attended the Hasbrouck Institute in Jersey City, and received architectural training from the Beaux-Arts trained Detlef Lienau in 1865-70. Hardenbergh, who began his own architectural practice in New York in 1870, became one of the city's most distinguished architects. Recognized for their picturesque compositions and practical planning, his buildings often took their inspiration from the French, Dutch, and German Renaissance styles. Hardenbergh was a prolific architect and designed many types of buildings, including: office buildings such as the Western Union Telegraph Company Building (1884, located in the Ladies Mile Historic District) at Fifth Avenue and 23<sup>rd</sup> Street; the Astor Building (1885, demolished) on Wall Street; Romanesque Revival style commercial buildings such as the warehouse at Broadway and West 51<sup>st</sup> Street (1892, demolished) and the Schermerhorn Building (1889-90, a designated New York City Landmark and located in the Noho Historic District), 376-380 Lafayette Street; as well as numerous individual houses, both freestanding country homes and city rowhouses. Of the latter type, some

of his best-known examples include the picturesque rows on West 73<sup>rd</sup> Street (in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District), built in 1882 for Edward S. Clark.

Hardenbergh is best known, however, for his luxury hotel and apartment house designs. Among the earliest of these are the German Renaissance Revival style Dakota Apartments (1880-84, a designated New York City Landmark and located within the Upper West Side/ Central Park West Historic District), 1 West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street; and the Hotel Albert, now Albert Apartments (1883), 75-77 University Place, aka 42 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street. His three earliest mid-town hotels, the Waldorf (1893-95), Fifth Avenue and West 33<sup>rd</sup> Street; its addition, the Astoria (1895-97), Fifth Avenue and West 34<sup>th</sup> Street; and the Manhattan Hotel (1896), Madison and East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, have all been demolished, but when constructed they set the standard for luxury hotel design, both on the exterior and the interior. The turrets, gables and balconies seen on the exteriors formed a picturesque composition, while the comfortable interior arrangements, and fine decoration added to the sumptuousness of the visitor's experience. Hardenbergh continued to perfect his luxury hotel designs in the Raleigh Hotel, Washington, D.C. (1898/1905/1911, demolished) and the Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C. (1900-01), as well as the Hotel Windsor (1906, with Bradford Lee Gilbert) in Montreal, and the Copley Plaza Hotel (1910-12) in Boston. The Plaza Hotel is among Hardenbergh's most famous and critically acclaimed designs.

### Warren & Wetmore<sup>32</sup>

Whitney Warren (1864-1943), born in New York City, studied architectural drawing privately, attended Columbia College for a time, and continued his studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1885 to 1894. Upon his return to New York, he worked in the office of McKim, Mead & White. One of Warren's country house clients was Charles Delavan Wetmore. Born in Elmira, New York, Wetmore (1866-1941) was a graduate of Harvard University (1889) and Harvard Law School (1892), who had also studied architecture and had designed three dormitory buildings (c.1890) before joining a law firm. Impressed by his client's architectural ability, Warren persuaded Wetmore to leave law and to establish Warren & Wetmore in 1898. While Warren was the principal designer of the firm and used his social connections to provide it with clients, Wetmore became the legal and financial specialist.

Warren & Wetmore became a highly successful and prolific architectural firm, best known for its designs for hotels and buildings commissioned by railroad companies. The firm's work was concentrated in New York during the first three decades of the twentieth century, but it also executed projects across the United States and overseas. The designs were mainly variations of the neo-Classical idiom, including essays in the Beaux-Arts and neo-Renaissance styles. Warren & Wetmore's first major commission, the result of a competition, was the flamboyant New York Yacht Club (1899-1900, a designated New York City Landmark), 37 West 44<sup>th</sup> Street. The firm was responsible for the design of the Chelsea Piers (1902-10, demolished), along the Hudson River between Little West 12<sup>th</sup> Street and West 23<sup>rd</sup> Streets); the Vanderbilt Hotel (1910-13), 4 Park Avenue; and a number of luxury apartment houses, such as 903 Park Avenue (1912).

Warren & Wetmore is most notably associated with the design of Grand Central Terminal (1903-13 with Reed & Stem and William J. Wilgus, engineer, a designated exterior and interior New York City Landmark), East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Park Avenue, as well as a number of other projects in its vicinity. Whitney Warren was the cousin of William K. Vanderbilt, chairman of the board of the New York Central Railroad, who was responsible for the firm's selection as chief designers. Nearby development by the firm over the span of two decades included: Hotel Belmont (1905-06, demolished); Biltmore Hotel (1912-14, significantly altered), Vanderbilt Avenue and East 43<sup>rd</sup> Street; Commodore Hotel (1916-19, significantly altered), 125 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street; Hotel Ambassador (1921, demolished); and New York Central Building (1927-29, a designated New York City Landmark), 230 Park Avenue. The firm's later work displayed an increased interest in the "composition of architectural mass."<sup>33</sup> The Heckscher Building (1920-21), 730 Fifth Avenue; Steinway Hall (1924-25, a designated New York City Landmark), 109-



113 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street; Aeolian Building (1925-27, a designated New York City Landmark), 689-691 Fifth Avenue; and Consolidated Edison Co Building Tower (1926), 4 Irving Place, in particular, show the firm's success in its use of setbacks and picturesque towers. Little was constructed by the firm after 1930. Whitney Warren retired from Warren & Wetmore in 1931, but remained a consulting architect. Charles Wetmore was the firm's senior partner until the end of his life.

The architectural office of Warren & Wetmore developed a successful formula in the 1900s and 1910s that it employed for its many luxurious hotel and apartment house designs: tall masonry blocks with three or four stories at the top and bottom articulated in a restrained classical vocabulary.<sup>34</sup> Influenced by the work of British neo-Classical architect Robert Adam, the firm's design for the Ritz-Carlton Hotel (1910, demolished) established an influential standard called "Ritz Hotel Adam," characterized by delicate reliefs set against broad, smooth surfaces. In its hotel interiors, the firm accommodated the expanding social demands of well-to-do Americans by providing vast halls for promenading, lounging, and public dining. Among the most notable spaces in the firm's hotels were the elegant elliptical restaurant of the Ritz-Carlton and the cavernous Della Robbia Grill and Bar of the Vanderbilt Hotel (The Della Robbia Bar is a designated New York City Interior Landmark).

#### The 1905-07 Design of the Plaza Hotel's Interiors

At the Plaza Hotel, Henry Hardenbergh's design is represented by five spaces: the 59th Street Lobby, the Main Corridor, the Oak Room, the Edwardian Room and the Palm Court. At the time of the Plaza's opening, H. W. Frohne complained: "if we are to express our opinion on the merit of its interior decorative treatment we should say that it is characterized by a failure to make the public rooms entertaining."<sup>35</sup> *The New York Times*, however, admired the restraint: "While on all sides there is ample evidence of the lavish expenditure of money, there is a note of repression that prevails throughout the decorations and furnishings in marked contrast to the gaudy ornamentation to be found in some of New York's large hotels."<sup>36</sup> Architectural critic Paul Goldberger wrote of Hardenbergh's work at the Plaza: "The inside reflects Hardenbergh's priorities. The rooms are grand in scale--and yet relatively simple in detail; for all their reliance on historical elements, they have never been fussy or prissy. . ."<sup>37</sup>

In a 1918 obituary, Richard F. Bach wrote: "Hardenbergh was the pioneer hotel builder, the first to develop the esthetic problem of hotel design and the mechanical problem of hotel planning for safety and convenience."<sup>38</sup> According to Hardenbergh, American architects of hotels, office buildings and residences, had "accomplished what nobody else has done. We have adapted ourselves to new conditions, both esthetically and in accordance with style." Hardenbergh emphasized that interior design was an important aspect of architecture: "The architect has to deal with three factors, all of equal importance, first the artistic element; second, construction, and third, interior decoration."<sup>39</sup> In his 1902 article on hotel design, Hardenbergh recognized the social significance of a hotel's public spaces, noting that modern hotels accommodate both lodgers and local residents using its entertainment facilities. He predicted that "the setting apart of rooms for men or women is being abandoned," with the only requirement being the provision of rooms where smoking was not permitted. Glass screens or partitions, however, could be used as barriers resulting in "greater freedom in social life, less exclusiveness and fuller opportunity to view the life and movement going on within the house."<sup>40</sup>

Hardenbergh's plan featured spacious public rooms connected by a broad main corridor that clearly and easily linked all the major spaces of the ground floor and created a variety of vistas. Hardenbergh's L-shaped plan provided entrances on 59<sup>th</sup> Street (Central Park South), Fifth Avenue and 58<sup>th</sup> Street with the principal entrance originally on 59<sup>th</sup> Street located in the center of that section of the building. The 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby connected to the Main Corridor which led to the Oak Room (originally Bar Room) and Oak Bar (originally Broker's Offices) to the west and the Edwardian Room (originally Men's Grill) to the east. The corridor wrapped

around three sides of the Palm Court (originally Tea Room), which was located in the center of the building at the L's pivot point and separated the Palm Court from the Plaza Restaurant (a portion of which is now the Grand Army Plaza lobby), which faced Fifth Avenue. A subsidiary Fifth Avenue entrance separated the Plaza Restaurant from the 58<sup>th</sup> Street Restaurant (no longer extant) located in the southeast corner of the building. At the southwestern edge of the Palm Court, the main corridor made a right angle and connected to the 58<sup>th</sup> Street entrance (not part of this designation.) Despite Hardenbergh's prediction that hotels were abandoning rooms used solely by men or women, the Plaza had a men-only café and bar (now the Edwardian Room and the Oak Room) as well as a ladies reception room. The spaces at the Plaza allocated to men were segregated in the northwestern and northeastern corners of the building, while the main lobby, Palm Court, and restaurants, which were used by both sexes, were physically separated by the corridor but visually connected. The Palm Court functioned en suite with the Plaza restaurant, opening into "one vast dining hall."<sup>41</sup> Of these spaces, the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby, Oak Room, Edwardian Room and Main Corridor are largely intact, while the Palm Court retains many original features.

Contributing to the overall effect of the public spaces was the work of numerous decorators and fabricators. Hardenbergh and Fred Sterry coordinated a number of firms working on the interiors: L. Alavoine & Co. decorated the restaurant and Oak Room and provided furniture and rugs for some of the other spaces; other furniture (including that of the Oak Room) was provided by the Pooley Furniture Co.; and most of the chandeliers were made by the Sterling Bronze Co. The Edwardian Room was decorated by Wm. Baumgarten & Co. and the ceiling and stucco work was by McNulty Bros of Chicago. The Palm Court was decorated by E. Spencer Hall & Co., with the caryatids from Pottier & Stymus and the column capitals, metal mouldings and wreaths inset into the floor by Winslow Bros. Company.<sup>42</sup> Fred Sterry, the hotel manager, stated that all the fixtures and furnishings were custom-made for the building: "Everything is specially made and specially fitted for a purpose. I will venture to say there is not a stock thing in the decorations. Even the border for the mosaic floor was designed for this room. . ."<sup>43</sup> The excellence of the craftsmanship throughout the building was noted, with architecture magazines paying particular attention to the high quality of the woodwork in the Oak Bar and Edwardian Room as well as the high quality of the stonework throughout the building.

The double height Beaux-Arts style 59th Street Lobby, the original entrance, was decorated by L. Alavoine & Co. This U-shaped space features a mosaic floor, a coffered plaster ceiling with restrained classical detailing, strikingly-veined white marble walls, Breccia marble pilasters with Corinthian capitals decorated with gilt bronze, revolving doors finished with bronze and oak, lunettes with heavy moldings above the entrances, mirrors with geometrically-patterned bronze frames, and elaborate bronze elevator doors separated by piers with applied bronze decoration. For Hardenbergh, the hotel lobby created an important first impression upon the visitor. "The main entrance should open upon a spacious and imposing hall, decorated and embellished in a rich and sumptuous, although severe, manner to impress the visitor with the sense of comfort, luxury, refinement, or other cheer which are to be found within the walls."<sup>44</sup> He described it as one of the most significant of the building's public spaces. "This apartment . . . should be regarded as of great importance, as it is the heart of the building from which all life springs and to which it returns; in size large enough to accommodate a multitude of arriving and departing travelers, and at the same time to admit of intercourse between those lodging in or visiting the house."<sup>45</sup> Contemporary reviews admired the marble of the walls and pilasters, the placement of the elevators—providing both easy access and supervision by the office—and the combination of the marble with the gilt bronze.<sup>46</sup>

In planning the corridors of the hotel, Hardenbergh sought to create public spaces that accommodated crowds yet preserved "a sense of refined repose when the number of guests is few. . ." He achieved this through the spatial sophistication of the corridors, which were noted for the creation of vistas and their planning, clustering reception rooms and restaurants around

the main corridor to give a sense of space and “homelikeness.”<sup>47</sup> The corridors feature mosaic floors, coffered plaster ceilings with restrained classical detailing, strikingly-veined and carefully matched white marble walls, Breccia marble pilasters with Corinthian capitals decorated with gilt bronze, mirrors with geometrically patterned bronze frames, Corinthian columns at the Palm Court and arched doorways that open onto the Fifth Avenue Lobby and Palm Court. An architectural magazine commented: “The marblework about the first floor is particularly beautiful, and is one of the most attractive features. Many large surfaces are made up of matching blocks cut and turned to match the veining of the stone. All are perfect in setting and finish.”<sup>48</sup>

The Oak Room, designed in the German Renaissance Revival style, has dark stained paneling of either Flemish or English oak and a coved plaster ceiling that extends to the back of the room as barrel vaults into three deep niches that originally framed the bar (demolished). Forming the focal point of the room, each niche is decorated with elaborate carvings as well as murals of medieval castles that fill the arches. Decorative elements related to the consumption of alcohol include the deeply carved oval reliefs resembling wine casks and figures in repose on the west wall as well as a brass chandelier festooned with grapes and a single figure hoisting a tankard. Hardenbergh admitted to being “very fond” of the German Renaissance.<sup>49</sup> Contemporary reviews admired the carving of the woodwork and the contrast between the vividly colored murals and dark woodwork.<sup>50</sup>

The Edwardian Room, designed in the Spanish Renaissance Revival style, features paneled oak wainscoting and an elaborate trussed ceiling with carved bosses, stenciled decoration and mirrors between the truss struts. H. W. Frohne, who found the café to be pleasing but not amusing, extolled the effect of the mirrors in the trusses: “the ceiling beams have been inlaid with mirrors in such a way as to give the beams the appearance of highly decorated trusses. It is this simple device which, in fact, accomplishes more in giving value to the decoration of this room than the elaborate wood work of the painted ceiling.”<sup>51</sup> Other reviews also noted the elaborate ceiling with mirrors, as well as the subdued color scheme creating the need for ample natural and artificial light.<sup>52</sup>

Since the opening of the hotel, the Palm Court has served as the tea room. Modeled on the Winter Garden at London's Hotel Carlton, the Palm Court originally featured a leaded and stained glass ceiling (which has subsequently been replaced). Designed in the neo-Classical Revival style by architect Henry Hardenbergh with interior decoration by E. Spencer Hall & Co., working in collaboration with L. Alavoine and Co., the Palm Court is separated from the east arm of the main corridor by a colonnade of marble columns and was located opposite the Plaza Restaurant (removed 1920-21). The walls of the Palm Court are faced with Caen stone (possibly artificial) and are articulated as arches. The side walls are accented with a giant order of highly polished strikingly veined marble pilasters topped by gilded bronze capitals. On the west walls the arches are supported by marble caryatids supplied by the decorators Pottier & Stymus and depicting the Four Seasons. The caryatids originally framed mirrored walls (replaced by mirrored folding doors in 1920-21). The room retains its elaborately detailed cornice and transverse beams. Hardenbergh praised the treatment of restaurant spaces as garden settings in his 1902 article on hotels: “The treatment of a portion of the space set aside for dining as a garden, using plants, flowers, fountains, etc., has become general, and is a marked feature of improvement.”<sup>53</sup> The Palm Court received the most attention in the press, one commentary noting that “There is no provision for a roof garden; the lofty tea room on the main floor with its spreading palms and tropical plants supplying in some measure this now common feature. . .” While *The New York Times* noted that “This profusion of greenery, together with the mirrors, the long casement windows, and the glass dome, with sunlight sifting through, combine to give a cool, open, gardenlike effect.”<sup>54</sup> Contemporary reviews noted the stonework of the floors and walls, and the caryatids representing the four seasons.<sup>55</sup>

### 1919-1922 addition and 1929 Grand Ballroom

Hardenbergh commented in an interview that he had never built a hotel that did not have a later addition.<sup>56</sup> The Plaza Operating Company had prepared for this from the beginning by purchasing additional land on West 58<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>57</sup> The company continued to assemble the parcels between 5-19 West 58<sup>th</sup> Street until 1920, when it finally purchased the properties at 15-17 West 58<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>58</sup> Counting on acquiring the land, the company went ahead and filed for the 18-story addition on August 4, 1919. The application called for “Rooms in lower stories enlarged. . . . Entertaining suite with place for assembly, such as reception room and ball room in lower stories of addition. . . .”<sup>59</sup> The design, by Warren & Wetmore, created a Fifth Avenue entrance where the main dining with its “champagne porch” had been and placed a new restaurant in the center of the building behind the Palm Court with a ballroom above. Statements by manager Fred Sterry suggested that prohibition had been a factor in the elimination of the easily accessible and highly visible restaurant and champagne porch. The Terrace Room (new restaurant), in contrast, was not directly accessible from the street and could only be entered by traversing the lobby, corridors or Palm Court: “The entire east side of The Plaza will be turned into an entrance and lobby. A new dance floor is being installed in the new addition to the southwest side of the hotel that, according to its builders, will be one of the finest in the country. ‘We wanted to keep ‘the porch’ in its former condition and serve ginger ale and elderberry juice,’ Mr. Sterry said, ‘but it couldn’t be done. We’ll try to give them as nice a dance room as we had a champagne room before’.”<sup>60</sup> The new addition opened on October 14, 1921, with a screening of the movie “Peter Ibbetson,” in the ballroom, although the Building Department did not list the addition as complete until April 1922.<sup>61</sup>

Illustrations of Warren & Wetmore’s interiors appear in the February 1922 issue of *Architecture and Building*. Warren & Wetmore preferred to use subtly contrasting decorative schemes in a hotel’s public rooms to give each space its own identity: “By varying the materials used and the shapes and proportions of the rooms, schemes of the decoration, hangings and furniture, a harmonious effect can be obtained for the ensemble and yet each of the rooms be given a distinct individuality.”<sup>62</sup> Warren & Wetmore’s goal for the Plaza was to elevate the already high standards of the interiors: “In the increase and reconstruction the decorative keynote of the Plaza has been closely adhered to. Always renowned for rich decorations and magnificent appointments, this standard has been enriched if anything in the new production. The gorgeousness of the “Palm Room” is extended to an even higher refinement in the new restaurant and new ballroom. The riches of French styles in architecture are well presented both in relief and color.”<sup>63</sup> P. J. Durcan, Inc., provided the ornamental and plain plaster, the Batavia & New York Woodworking Co. provided the fireproof wood trim and John B. Smeraldi did the decorative work.<sup>64</sup>

Warren & Wetmore established the new Fifth Avenue Lobby as the main entrance to the building.<sup>65</sup> The new lobby did not include such hotel functions as a registration desk or elevators to the rooms but instead provided an easily and publicly accessible entry to the popular Palm Court and Edwardian Room. Warren & Wetmore’s plan reduced the width of the former dining area from five to three bays and the length by one bay by placing a U-shaped mezzanine along the north, east, and south walls of the room. Three vestibules leading to the Fifth Avenue entrances were placed beneath the east part of the mezzanine. The new lobby was decorated with neo-classical ornament in bas-relief. Warren & Wetmore preserved certain elements from Hardenbergh’s 1907 dining room such as the three arched openings on the west side leading to the main corridor and Palm Court and some wall and ceiling surfaces, although the original decorative elements were mostly either simplified, removed or replaced. The lobby presently features a mosaic floor (1921), paneled pilasters (1907 and later), elaborate wrought iron at the upper part of the walls (1921 and later), beamed ceiling (1907) and a crystal chandelier (after 1921). The mezzanines were enclosed and the plasterwork modified in 1944. Warren & Wetmore echoed Hardenbergh’s emphasis on the significance of the hotel lobby in creating an important

impression upon the visitor, and added: “. . . it would appear to be the most difficult room into which to inject any degree of charm. . . and it is only by the skillful use of materials of harmonious colors and textures that a satisfying result can be obtained.”<sup>66</sup> The Fifth Avenue Lobby features mirrored pilasters, neo-classical bas relief ornament, arched openings to the Palm Court and other major public spaces and a beamed ceiling.

The neo-Renaissance style Terrace Room has arched openings connected to the southern balcony and the Palm Court on the east. Painted decorations featuring Renaissance decorative motifs and classically inspired figures embellish the pilasters, blind arches and ceiling. Warren & Wetmore considered the restaurant to be only secondary to the lobby in significance, but designers could use a variety of materials and styles for restaurant designs. In the firm’s Biltmore Hotel restaurant, “a finely designed plaster ceiling in low relief has been finished in dull old gold and subdued colors, and any feeling of coldness has been eliminated by the use of rich wine-colored hangings and by the profusion of plants and growing flowers.”<sup>67</sup> The stylized floral and foliate motifs and subdued but rich color scheme of the Terrace Room relate to the Biltmore restaurant scheme. Warren & Wetmore believed the creation of three different levels of space in the Terrace Room added to the spatial richness of the hotel interior: “If the grades of the streets of property permit, the interest of the entire ground floor as a whole will also be much enhanced by changes in the floor levels and by the adroit use of steps and terraces.”<sup>68</sup> The *Architecture and Building* article on the addition also commented that the terracing arrangement is “both unusual and interesting.”<sup>69</sup> The painted decorations in the Terrace Room were primarily created by noted interior decorator John B. Smeraldi. A native of Palermo, Italy, Smeraldi came to the United States in 1889 and worked as a muralist, decorative painter and furniture designer. As chief designer for Marcotte & Co., Smeraldi worked on several Vanderbilt houses as well as the White House. Later Smeraldi contributed to the decoration of the interiors of the Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, the Breakers in Palm Beach, Florida and the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec.<sup>70</sup> Smeraldi’s painted decorations may have also included the balcony doors whose painted decorations are still intact and include decorative lunettes with mythological animals, painted foliate moldings and heraldic designs on the paneled doors. Similar to the Terrace Room, its foyer features an elaborate painted coffered ceiling, marble floors and pilasters.

The Warren & Wetmore-designed Ballroom had a paneled ceiling of octagons, crosses and hexagons decorated by John Smeraldi, square pillars with ornate capitals supporting a balcony on three sides of the room with a stage at the western end and six ornate chandeliers hung from the ceiling. The room could accommodate 1,000 people for a dance or 800 for a dinner.<sup>71</sup> For unknown reasons a new Grand Ballroom—located in the same area of the building but probably shorter than the 1921 space—was designed and constructed in 1929 by the architectural firm of Schultze & Weaver.<sup>72</sup> One of the pre-eminent American hotel designers, the firm of Schultze & Weaver was responsible for the Biltmore Hotel, Coral Gables, Florida (1924-26), the Breakers, Palm Beach, Florida (1925-26), the Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, California (1921-23), and three significant apartment hotels in New York City: the Pierre (1929-30) 2-6 E. 61<sup>st</sup> Street; the Sherry-Netherland (1926-27), 783 Fifth Avenue (both in the Upper East Side Historic District); and the Waldorf-Astoria (1929-31, a designated New York City Landmark), 301-319 Park Avenue.<sup>73</sup> Schultze & Weaver were noted for being able to create interiors that “show smart contemporary effects and beautiful period interpretations.”<sup>74</sup> The firm’s design for the Plaza Grand Ballroom falls into the latter category. The neo-Classical style Grand Ballroom has two elaborate chandeliers, a stage, boxes on the north and east sides with curved ornamental railings, arched openings and attached Ionic columns. The elaborate coved ceiling has inset coved rondels, lunettes and delicate bas relief decoration. The style as well as the white and gold color scheme were probably intended to evoke the style and color scheme of the original ballroom located on the mezzanine of the north side of the building (now demolished).<sup>75</sup>

### The Hilton Plaza (1943-1953)

Harry S. Black died in 1930, Bernhard Beinecke in 1932 and Fred Sterry in 1933.<sup>76</sup> The United States Realty and Improvement Company, the parent organization of the Plaza Operating Company, sold the hotel to the Atlas Corporation, with which Conrad N. Hilton was affiliated, in 1943.<sup>77</sup> Under Hilton's ownership, some significant changes were made to the Plaza Hotel interiors: the Fifth Avenue Lobby was renovated, the leaded glass skylight of the Palm Court was removed and replaced and the former brokerage office in the northwest corner of the building was converted into the Oak Bar. No architects have been associated with this work, but the firm of Frederick P. Platt & Brother did most of the architectural work at the Plaza throughout the 1940s, which suggests that the design of the new Palm Court laylight and Oak Bar can be attributed to the firm.<sup>78</sup>

In April 1944, the hotel applied to rework the Fifth Avenue Lobby, enclosing the gallery mezzanine and replacing "the present leaded glass dome in the Palm Court just west of the main 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. lobby with an ornamental plaster ceiling." The work, which cost \$1,500, began around July 14, 1944, and was completed one month later.<sup>79</sup> Hilton's decision to remove the dome was due to several factors: the 1921 addition blocked the amount of light entering through the dome leaving the space much darker than it had been, the dome had fallen into very bad repair and Hilton wanted to install air conditioning and the centrally located Palm Court was the logical place to install the system.<sup>80</sup>

The Tudor Revival style Oak Bar features paneled wood walls and a plaster ceiling with bas relief decorations of strapwork, and floral and foliate motifs. The Oak Bar, with its Everett Shinn murals, assumed its current configuration in 1945.<sup>81</sup> Originally brokerage offices, the space reputedly became an adjunct bar to the Oak Room between 1912 and Prohibition, when it was used by E. F. Hutton as offices. Hilton realized the space's commercial potential and moved the Hutton office to the newly created offices in the former Fifth Avenue lobby gallery, and the Oak Bar opened on January 13, 1945. Conrad Hilton commissioned Everett Shinn to paint three large canvas murals specifically for the Oak Bar space, which were installed shortly after the bar opened in January. The murals depict the hotel and its surroundings as they existed in 1907.

### Plaza Hotel (1953 to present)

In 1953 Conrad Hilton sold the Plaza Hotel to Boston industrialist A. M. Sonnabend.<sup>82</sup> The Sonnabend family owned the hotel, operating under various corporations, until 1974.<sup>83</sup> The hotel underwent a \$4,000,000 refurbishment in 1962 which involved both exterior and interior work.<sup>84</sup> On the interior this seems to have resulted in the repainting of some of the public rooms. The Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the Plaza Hotel an individual New York City Landmark in 1969. In a 1971 attempt to "project the popular hostelry into the world of today and tomorrow," the hotel's management removed the Grand Ballroom's layers of paint and varnish and introduced "the aura of today," through soft apricot and royal blue drapes and hangings.<sup>85</sup> The management's attempt to create a "sun-drenched indoor garden" by transforming the Edwardian Room into the Green Tulip was reviled by *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, who wrote: ". . .the dignity, scale and period authenticity of the Oak Room make the Green Tulip look like something out of a shopping center department store. . ." <sup>86</sup> The management restored the Edwardian Room in 1974.<sup>87</sup>

Western International Hotels Company (Westin) announced their planned acquisition of the Plaza for \$25,000,000 in November 1974.<sup>88</sup> The company spent an additional \$35,000,000 to restore the hotel and, in the words of Paul Goldberger: "trying to make the Plaza look more like the Plaza of old."<sup>89</sup> The entire Westin hotel chain—including the Plaza--was acquired by Robert M. Bass and the Aoki Corporation in 1987 and the Plaza was subsequently sold to Donald Trump in 1988. Fairmont Hotels and CDL Hotels International acquired the Plaza in 1995. Shortly before 2001, the Edwardian Room was again redecorated by Adam Tihany, which involved painting the woodwork of the walls with a light brown color with faux graining and installing

covering the original chandeliers with red lamp shades. In August 2004, Elad Properties bought the Plaza Hotel for \$675,000,000.

### Plaza Hotel Social History

The Plaza Hotel has had numerous well-known guests and its public rooms have held many notable events. Only a few days after the opening, Gladys Vanderbilt accepted Count Laslo Szechenyi's marriage proposal in the Palm Court.<sup>90</sup> In January 1908 Vanderbilt and Szechenyi, along with another engaged couple, Theodora Shonts and the Duc de Chaulnes, had tea in the Palm Court and attracted throngs of people who also wished to have tea. *The New York Times* reported: "at 4 o'clock crowds began to assemble in the hotel corridors and within a few minutes it was apparent that there was an unusual attraction. Within half an hour the corridors were impassable." Over 3,000 people arrived to have tea, causing Sterry to open the men's-only Edwardian Room and grillroom in the basement.<sup>91</sup> The Palm Court was immensely popular. *The New York Times* reported in 1909: "The Plaza is another of the hotels that has a large tea room [the Palm Court]. This has a capacity of 350. But here as at the Waldorf there is the same story of overflow into the main dining room. On an average 500 is the daily patronage, this number more than doubling on Saturdays. On these days the main dining room and sometimes the breakfast room is given over to the tea drinkers. On a number of recent Saturdays the patronage swelled to such a volume that the management was on the point of commandeering the men's café."<sup>92</sup> By the early 1920s the Tea Room was referred to as the Palm Room; it was officially renamed the Palm Court in the mid-1930s.<sup>93</sup>

The Edwardian Room was originally used as a men's-only restaurant, however, around the early 1920s the men's-only rule was relaxed.<sup>94</sup> The Edwardian Room was known for most of the first half of the century as the Café; it was called the Plaza Restaurant in the 1940s before being renamed the Edwardian Room in 1955.<sup>95</sup>

The Oak Room, originally the Men's Bar, remained a bar until Prohibition, when the bar at the west end was removed and the room was used for storage. Reopened as a restaurant in 1934, it was at that time given its current name.<sup>96</sup> The performer George Cohan was a regular patron of the Oak Room, and after his death a plaque was hung in the northwest corner of the room in his honor.<sup>97</sup> Architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who always stayed at the Plaza when he was in New York, reportedly took credit for stopping a potentially disastrous renovation of the Oak Room and Edwardian Room.<sup>98</sup> In the late 1940s the Oak Room was opened to women for supper but closed to them until 3 p.m. when the stock exchange closed. In August 1958 the Oak Bar played a supporting role in Alfred Hitchcock's "North by Northwest", in the scene where Cary Grant is abducted from the hotel.<sup>99</sup> On February 12, 1969, the National Organization for Women staged a sit-in at the Oak Room to protest the lunch men-only policy. Betty Friedan, Diana Gartner and a third woman sat at a table and were refused service until 3 p.m. After picketing and negative publicity, the Plaza Hotel rescinded the men-only policy around four months later.<sup>100</sup>

Designed as a restaurant, the Terrace Room has served as a multi-purpose room housing a variety of functions including luncheons, dinners, receptions and press conferences.<sup>101</sup> It is unclear how long the Terrace Room functioned as a restaurant open to the general public, the Edwardian Room, Oak Room and Palm Court (along with the slightly later Persian Room and Rendez-Vous) are listed as being the hotel's primary restaurants from the mid 1920s through the 1950s.<sup>102</sup> In 1956 Marilyn Monroe and Laurence Olivier held a press conference to announce her latest film, "The Prince and the Showgirl", garnering national attention when the shoulder strap of Monroe's dress broke.<sup>103</sup> During the Beatles' six day stay at the Plaza in February 1964, a photo opportunity with the Beatles and Dr. Joyce Brothers occurred in the Terrace Room on February 10, 1964.<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton also held a press conference to promote their film, "Dr. Faustus", in the Terrace Room on February 5, 1968.

The Grand Ballroom has housed numerous benefits, receptions and weddings. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor attended the December Ball, a benefit for disabled veterans, on

December 11, 1946.<sup>105</sup> Patricia Kennedy and Peter Lawford held their wedding reception in the Grand Ballroom on April 24, 1954.<sup>106</sup> On December 8, 1959, Senator John F. and Jackie Kennedy attended the Wild West Ball benefiting a Kennedy family charity, the Kennedy Child Study Center for Retarded Children.<sup>107</sup> The Grand Ballroom was the site of Truman Capote's famous November 28, 1966, Black & White Costume Ball. Capote held his "little masked ball for Kay Graham and all my friends," in honor of Katherine Graham, the president of the Washington Post, and invited 540 people who were described "as spectacular a group as has ever been assembled for a private party in New York. . ." Guests included Frank Sinatra and Mia Farrow, Claudette Colbert, Lynda Bird Johnson and Alice Roosevelt Longworth (President Theodore Roosevelt's daughter). Men were asked to wear dinner jackets with black masks, while women were asked to wear black or white dresses and white masks. Capote stated: "I wanted it at The Plaza because I think it's the only really beautiful ballroom left in the United States."<sup>108</sup> Shunning a White House wedding, Julie Nixon and David Eisenhower held their wedding reception in the ballroom on December 22, 1968.<sup>109</sup>

Since its opening in 1907 the Plaza has hosted numerous celebrities including Enrico Caruso, F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, the Beatles and of course the fictitious Eloise. It has been the location for numerous movies including the "Plaza Suite", "North by Northwest", "Barefoot in the Park" and "Funny Girl". Frank Lloyd Wright, who was never enthusiastic about other architects' works, always stayed at the Plaza when he visited New York City and even managed to approve of Hardenbergh's design: "It was built by the Astors, Astorists, Astorites, the Vanderbilts, Plasterbilts, and Whoeverbilts, who wanted a place to dress up and parade and see themselves in the great mirrors. So they sent for the finest master of the German Renaissance style, Henry Hardenbergh, and he did this—a skyscraper, but not the monstrous thing the skyscraper was to become later. He still managed to keep it with a human sense."<sup>110</sup> In 1975 *The New York Times*, in an editorial calling for the designation of the Plaza's publicly accessible spaces, described the interiors as "among the most splendid public spaces in the city."<sup>111</sup>



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Research Department would like to thank David G. Lowe for sharing his research with the Commission. Ada Louise Huxtable, "An Edwardian Splendor Or Green Tulip Modern?" *The New York Times*, November 5, 1971, 45.

<sup>2</sup> "Artless Plaza," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1975, clipping in Landmarks Preservation Commission, Plaza Hotel Research File.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission, Coty Building Designation Report (LP-1534) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1985), prepared by Marjorie Pearson and Aeolian Building Designation Report (LP-2125) (N.Y.: City of New York, 2002), prepared by Jay Shockley.

<sup>4</sup> A. C. David, "The New Fifth Avenue," *Architectural Record* (July 1907), 1.

<sup>5</sup> New York County Register's Office, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, New York City to Harris Aronson on January 24, 1853, Liber 627, page 29; New York City to Joseph B. Allee on February 14, 1853, Liber 626, page 246; New York City to Geo. C. Jefferies on March 31, 1853, Liber 627, page 636; New York City to Sylvester Brush on May 14, 1853, Liber 637, pages 190, 192, 193.

<sup>6</sup> Lots 29, 46 Patrick and Gertrude B. Callaghan to John Anderson on June 28, 1879, Liber 1129, page 636; lots 27, 28, 47, 48 Isaac P and Cornelia Martin to John Anderson on June 4, 1872, Liber 1225, page 99; lots 25, 26, 49, 50 Jacob and Libbie Vanderpoel to John Anderson on December 3, 1872, Liber 1265, page 638.

<sup>7</sup> Will L. Taylor, chief draughtsman, *The City of New York* (N.Y.: Galt & Hoy, 1879), Collection of the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division <http://memory.loc.gov>, show an undeveloped site; Curtis Gathje, *At The Plaza: An Illustrated History of the World's Most Famous Hotel* (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 2-3 illustrated a print and photograph of the New York Skating Club, however, it is not possible without additional documentation to precisely determine the location of the photograph.

<sup>8</sup> "Out Among the Builders," *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 30 (December 23, 1882), 140; Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, and David Fishman, *New York 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age* (N.Y.: The Monacelli Press, 1999), 530-531; Christopher Grey, "The 'first' Plaza, by McKim, Mead & White survived only fifteen years," *Avenue* (September 1988), 78.

<sup>9</sup> Lots 25-29 inclusive, lots 46-52 inclusive, John Charles and Harriette M. Anderson to John D. Phyfe and James Campbell on October 29, 1883, Liber 1749, page 444; Stern, *New York 1880*, 529-30; Grey, 78.

<sup>10</sup> Stern, *New York 1880*, 529-30, suggests that only the foundations were constructed, while Grey, 78, states that it was "largely completed, it was never occupied. . ." *E. Robinson Atlas of City of NY Part of Bronx to Van Cortlandt* (N.Y.: E. Robinson, 1885), pl. 18 shows a masonry building on the site labeled Fifth Ave. Plaza Hotel, but gives no indication of the number of stories or whether it was occupied.

<sup>11</sup> Lots 25-29 inclusive, lots 46-52 inclusive Fred'k G. Gedney rep. John D. Phyfe et al Defendants to The New York Life Insurance Company on September 24, 1888, Liber 2161, page 322; Leland M. Roth, *The Architecture of McKim, Mead & White: A Building List* (N.Y.: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1978), 122; Stern, *New York 1880*, 530; Gathje, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Moses King, *King's Handbook of New York* (Boston: Moses King, 1893), 222.

<sup>13</sup> This section is based on Eve Brown, *The Plaza, Its Life and Times* (N.Y.: Meredith Press, 1967), 15-21; Gathje, 11; and Bill Harris, *The Plaza* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Poplar Books Inc., 1981), 11-17.

<sup>14</sup> Lots 25-29, lots 46-52 N. Y. Life Insurance Company to Plaza Realty Co. on December 1, 1902, Liber 86, page 484.

<sup>15</sup> "Another Fine Hotel now on the City's List," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1907, SM3.

<sup>16</sup> "New Plaza Hotel Cost \$12,500,000," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1907, 4.

<sup>17</sup> "Another Fine Hotel."

<sup>18</sup> "New Plaza Hotel Will Open To-Day," *The New York Times*, October 1, 1907, 12; "New Plaza Hotel Cost,"; "Another Fine Hotel."

<sup>19</sup> This section is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, Hotel Martinique Designation Report (LP-1983) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

<sup>20</sup> William Hutchins, "New York Hotels, I," *Architectural Record* 12 (Oct. 1902), 469.

<sup>21</sup> This phenomenon continued well into the twentieth century. In 1923, *Rider's New York*, noted that the modern American hotel was "not merely a hotel, but in a certain sense a public resort, frequented daily by a vast floating population comprised not only of casual strangers, but of resident New Yorkers, who take an unlicensed, yet undisputed advantage of a large proportion of the accommodations and privileges intended for the guests of the house. Any well-dressed stranger can enter unchallenged, use the parlors and sitting rooms as meeting places for social or business purposes, finish a day's correspondence on the hotel

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stationery...” Fremont Rider, ed., *Rider’s New York City, A Guide-Book for Travelers* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1923), 7.

<sup>22</sup> William Hutchins, “New York Hotels II,” *Architectural Record* 12 (Nov. 1902), 621.

<sup>23</sup> Hutchins, “New York Hotels II,” 621.

<sup>24</sup> A. C. David, “Three New Hotels,” *Architectural Record* 17 (Mar. 1905), 167-168.

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<sup>27</sup> H. I. Brock, “When Hotels Mirrored New York’s Life,” *The New York Times Magazine* (March 6, 1932), 12-13, 21.

<sup>28</sup> “Frederic Sterry, Hotel Man, Dead,” *The New York Times*, July 12, 1993, 17; Brown, 17, 73; Gathje, 13; Susan R. Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure: The Florida Resort Hotels of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant* (Gainesville, Fl.: University of Florida Press), 123.

<sup>29</sup> H. W. Frohne, “Designing a Metropolitan Hotel: The Plaza,” *Architectural Record* 22 (Sept. 1907), 358.

<sup>30</sup> “Another Fine Hotel;” also see “The New Plaza Hotel,” *New York Hotel Record* (September 24, 1907), 3, 6 for staffing of the hotel.

<sup>31</sup> The information on Hardenbergh was compiled from the architects’ research files of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, Henry J. Hardenbergh, and especially from the Landmarks Preservation Commission Hotel Martinique Designation Report (LP-1983) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1998), prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

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<sup>33</sup> Dennis McFadden, “Warren & Wetmore,” *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* 4 (N.Y. Free Press, 1982), 377.

<sup>34</sup> Material in this paragraph is from Landmarks Preservation Commission, Della Robbia Bar (aka the “Crypt,” now Fiori Restaurant), in the Vanderbilt Hotel Designation Report (LP-1904) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1994), prepared by David Briener

<sup>35</sup> Frohne, 364.

<sup>36</sup> “Another Fine Hotel.”

<sup>37</sup> Paul Goldberger, “At 75, Plaza Hotel Strives to Stay Old,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 1982, B1, B2.

<sup>38</sup> Richard F. Bach, “Henry Janeway Hardenbergh,” *Architectural Record* 44 (July 1918), 93.

<sup>39</sup> Sadakichi Hartmann, “A Conversation with Henry Janeway Hardenbergh,” *Architectural Record* 19 (May 1906), 379, 380.

<sup>40</sup> H. J. Hardenbergh, “Hotel,” Russell Sturgis, ed. *A Dictionary of Architecture and Building* 2 (N.Y.: The MacMillan Company, 1902; reprint Detroit, Gale Research Company, 1966), 411.

<sup>41</sup> “Newest Great Hotel,” *Real Estate Record and Guide* (September 14, 1907), 398.

<sup>42</sup> Information on the decorators and fabricators comes from “The Plaza Hotel: H. J. Hardenbergh, Architect,” *Architects’ and Builders’ Magazine* 9 (October 1907), 1-25; “The Plaza Hotel,” *The American Architect and Building News* 92 (October 26, 1907), 134-136.

<sup>43</sup> Harris, 17.

<sup>44</sup> Hardenbergh, 411.

<sup>45</sup> Hardenbergh, 411.

<sup>46</sup> “The Plaza Hotel,” *The American Architect and Building News*, 134; “The Plaza Hotel, H. J. Hardenbergh, Architect,” *Architects’ and Builders’ Magazine*, 1; “Another Fine Hotel.”

<sup>47</sup> “Some Interesting Features of Hotel Construction Exemplified in the Work of H. J. Hardenbergh,” *New York Architect* 4 (December 1910).

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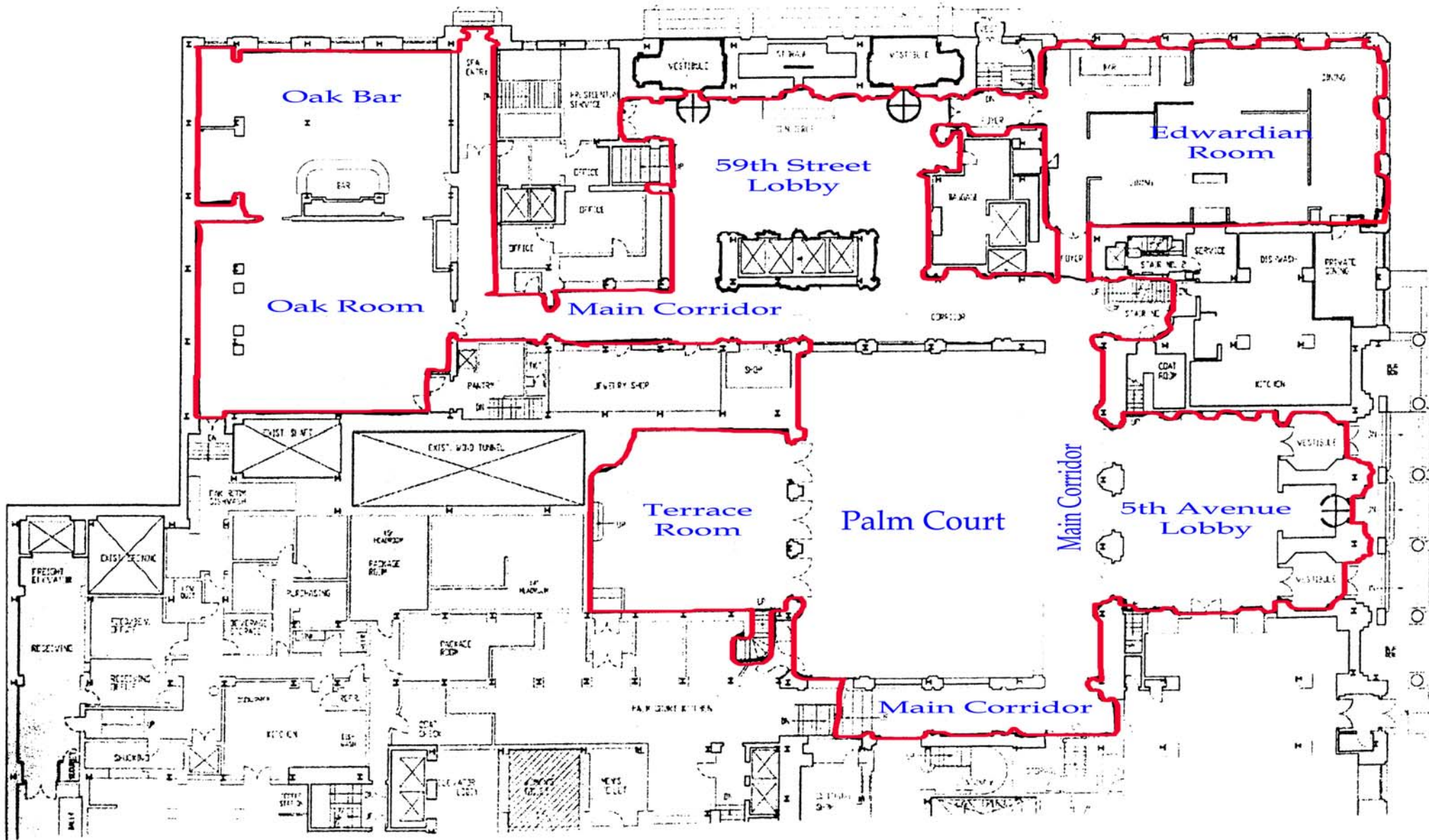
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<sup>51</sup> Frohne, 364.

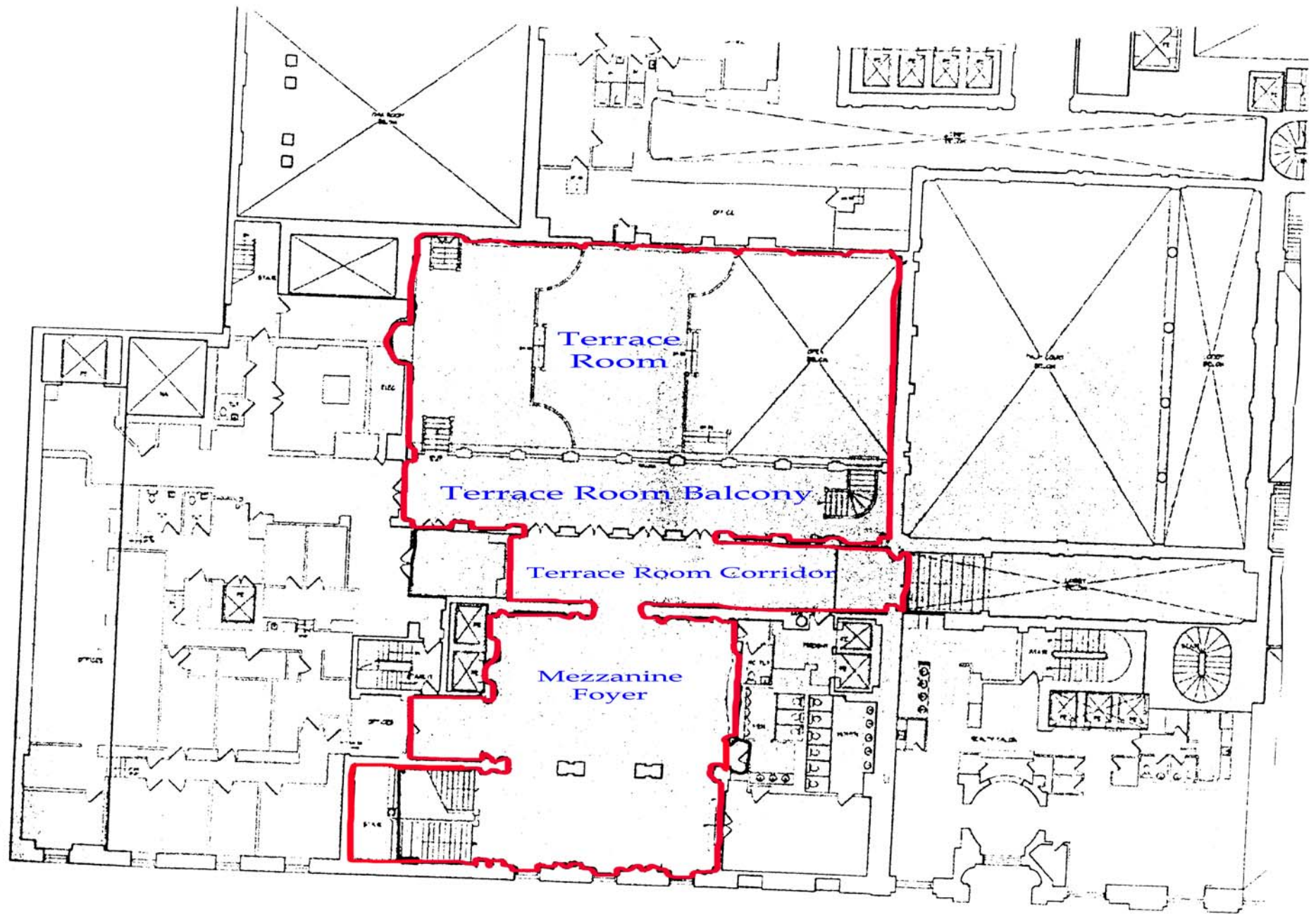
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- <sup>53</sup> Hardenbergh, 411.
- <sup>54</sup> “The Plaza Hotel,” *The American Architect and Building News*, 134; “Another Fine Hotel.”
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- <sup>57</sup> “Designing the Metropolitan Hotel,” 358.
- <sup>58</sup> “Plaza Hotel Buys,” *The New York Times*, May 28, 1920, 26.
- <sup>59</sup> New York City Department of Buildings (Alt. 2006-1919).
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- <sup>64</sup> “Hotel Plaza Addition,” 16.
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- <sup>66</sup> Hopkins, 205.
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- <sup>71</sup> “Hotel Plaza Addition,” 16.
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- <sup>104</sup> Gathje, 124-125.
- <sup>105</sup> Gathje, 84; *The New York Times*, December 22, 1946, 6.
- <sup>106</sup> Gathje, 108-109; "Patricia Kennedy Married to Actor," *The New York Times* April 25, 1954, 91 states that the reception was held in the Terrace Room, however, the photograph in Gathje is clearly of the Grand Ballroom.
- <sup>107</sup> Gathje, 120.
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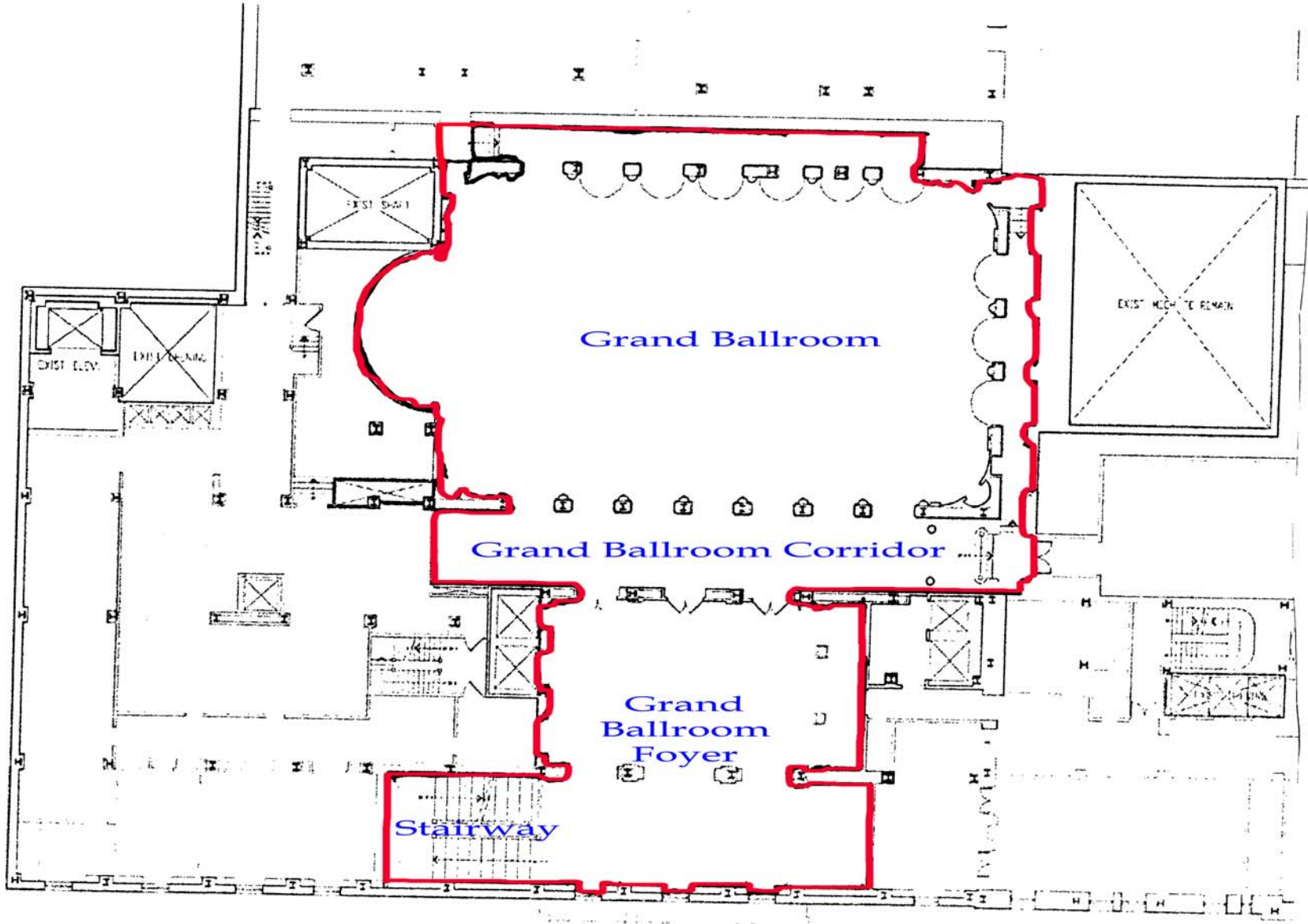
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- <sup>107</sup> Gathje, 120.
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- <sup>111</sup> "Artless Plaza."



Plaza Hotel  
Ground Floor Interior



Plaza Hotel  
Mezzanine, Terrace Room, Floor Interior



Plaza Hotel  
First Floor



**THE EDWARDIAN ROOM** (originally the Men's Grill, also called the Fifty-Ninth Street Café, the Fifth Avenue Café, the Plaza Restaurant, the Green Tulip, Plaza Suite, and One C.P.S.)

Architect: Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1905-07

Style: Spanish Renaissance Revival

Interior decoration: Wm. Baumgarten & Co., McNulty Brothers

Redecoration/Alterations: Minstral's gallery over kitchen door closed by plain plaster wall; doors to anteroom and entrance on Fifth Avenue removed; double doors to hallway to 59<sup>th</sup> Street lobby changed; double doors to kitchen changed; original bronze wall sconces removed; electric candles in chandeliers replaced by bulbs with frosted glass bowls; large fabric shades installed over chandeliers; wood paneling extended above 12 foot wainscoting to meet corbels on wall piers; non-historic light fixtures attached to walls and ceiling; non-historic wall sconces installed; wood wainscoting painted; various dividers attached to and removed from mosaic floor

The Edwardian Room is a 50 by 65 foot restaurant located at the northeast corner of the ground story of the Plaza Hotel. Originally a men's only restaurant, it had its own entrance and anteroom on the Fifth Avenue façade (at the south-eastern corner of the room). Although none of the rooms in the Plaza were originally assigned specific names, this was generally called the Men's Grill and provided the atmosphere of a private men's club where the rule was no business talk allowed.

This effect was enhanced by the décor which has been variously described as "Spanish Renaissance," "Northern European," and "Medieval." The firm of Messrs. Wm. Baumgarten & Co. has been given credit for the original design. The room had paneled and embellished Flemish oak wainscoting to the height of twelve feet, and a series of paired wooden trusses that crossed the ceiling from north to south. Sections of mirror glass were placed between the uprights of the trusses, to lighten the overall effect. The ceiling was further enhanced by smaller beams that divided the spaces between the trusses into sections. All the surfaces of these wooden beams, as well as the ceiling sections between them were decorated in tones of brown, gold and green, in subtle geometric and floral patterns. (All of this ornament remains in place today.) The underside of the horizontal members of the trusses are adorned by small metal bosses, and there are large wooden ones enhanced with faces and flanked by brackets centered in each pair of trusses. Large, heavily carved wooden corbels join the trusses to the walls and are embellished with the double P motif on shields seen throughout the hotel. The ceiling work has been attributed to the McNulty Brothers firm of Chicago. Aubosson tapestries, produced in France, were placed above the wainscoting, (on the east, west and some sections of the south walls) although these tapestries are no longer extant.

A small musicians' gallery fronted by a low decorative iron railing, was originally located at the mezzanine level, on the southern wall, above the doors to the kitchen. During a later renovation this area was enclosed by a plain plaster wall and the balcony removed. On the northern and eastern walls, large, three-part windows (extant) running from the ceiling to the top of the built-in radiators were placed to allow as much natural light as possible into the room. Between the top, single, fixed sash and the lower double-hung set the designers added a narrow panel of decorative relief plaster work, which is still extant today.

To light the room in the evening there were eight large bronze chandeliers hung on heavy chains from the paired wooden trusses, two on each. They consisted of two layers of five lights extending on curved arms in a circle from the center. Each light originally had a set of electric candles. These chandeliers are still there, although with replacement lights shielded by frosted glass bowls, and entirely covered by large fabric shades. A bronze, bulb-like pendent hangs

below the lights, and is embellished with shield-like motifs. Originally bronze wall sconces with electric candles were located near the top of the paneling but these have been removed. All of these original light fixtures were created by the Sterling Bronze Co.

The floor of the room was laid with small mosaic tile, primarily in white but with a wide decorative border in many colors. Since its installation, it has mostly been covered by carpets but it is still intact, if somewhat damaged by various renovations to the room.

In addition to the entrance off Fifth Avenue, the room could be entered from the main 59<sup>th</sup> Street lobby, via a small hall lined with marble and also containing a small florist shop. This led to double doors set near the center of the western wall. There was also a small, marble-lined hallway that led to the hallway near the Palm Court. Double doors to this entrance were located near the southwestern corner of the room. All of these entrances were framed with artificial Caen stone, heavily carved and embellished with classical motifs. The two entrances on the south wall were also surmounted by a carved pediment of the same material. All three of these door surrounds are extant. Another entrance to the room was created near the middle of the southern wall, for the service kitchen. Originally enclosed by double wooden doors pierced by small diamond windows, these doors have been replaced by non-historic ones, although the opening remains the same. There are now no doors in the portal to the east and the one on the western wall has non-historic glass and metal doors. Only the opening at the southwestern corner retains its original double wood and glass doors.

A small closet is located just to the south of the door to the main lobby. Early photographs show it fronted by a glass counter within the restaurant but its exact use is unknown. Currently there is no door to this closet.

During the hotel renovations of 1921, the area to the south of the Men's Grill that had served as the main restaurant was converted to an entrance and the separate entrance to the Men's Grill was closed. This restaurant opened to women, becoming the main dining room of the hotel. The room was variously known as the Fifty-Ninth Street Café, the Fifth Avenue Café, and eventually the Plaza Restaurant and during Prohibition "tea dances" were held in this space to attract customers. A mezzanine was created around the Fifth Avenue entranceway, with new staircases for access. The musicians' gallery that overlooked the Grill Room was thus opened up and more accessible.

As part of a renovation of the Fifth Avenue entrance in 1944 (Alt. 351-1944), the mezzanine was enclosed and the E. F. Hutton brokerage offices were moved to that space in 1945. It is likely that the musicians' gallery was closed at this time. Few further changes occurred to this room for quite a while. There is an application for an alteration in the Buildings Department dated to 1950 (#228). It calls for \$55,000 of alterations to this room and the architect listed is Julian G. Everett. To date, it has not been determined what these alterations consisted of or indeed if they were ever carried out.

In 1955, the name of this area was changed to the Edwardian Room, to commemorate the age of elegance during which the hotel was constructed.

The most dramatic change occurred to this room in 1971, under the ownership of the Sonesta International Hotel Corporation. In an attempt to modernize the space and bring Central Park indoors, the room was turned into "The Green Tulip" with numerous hanging plants, a central decorative iron gazebo and the addition of numerous "Tiffany" lamps. The wood paneling was painted a light brown with faux graining and the walls were painted pink and lime green. More stained glass was added to an outer doorway facing the Palm Court and a raised seating area was created in the southern half of the room. In an effort to attract younger people, a discotheque was held here in the late evenings.

Although the renovations were carried out by Sally Dryden, AID, the public response was overwhelmingly negative. Architecture critic for *The New York Times*, Ada Louise Huxtable wrote two scathing articles in which she declared that the remodeling “adulterates the Plaza” and called for its restoration. By 1974, the hotel realized its mistake and restored most of the room to its past formality. Using the designs of Charles Winslow, the hotel spent approximately \$60,000 on the renovations. The wall woodwork was repainted and grained in a darker color, red damask wall coverings were installed above the paneling and a more formal atmosphere was reestablished. The ceiling and lamps were not changed. Although the hotel reopened the restaurant with the name of “Plaza Suite,” the public was not swayed and it eventually returned to the “Edwardian Room.”

At some point after 1974, the damask was removed from the walls and on the projecting wall piers, the wood paneling was extended from the wainscoting to meet the corbels.

The most recent change to this room was done for the restaurant, “One C.P.S.” created before 2001. In this remodeling, the architect Adam Tihany again painted the dark, wood-covered walls a lighter color and covered the huge chandeliers with red lamp shades. The original wall sconces were removed and replaced with more modern ones, mounted high on the walls, and additional small hanging fixtures were added.

#### Descriptive List of Significant Features (all date to the original 1905-07 design)

- ceiling, including decorated oak ceiling trusses, mirrored panels, decorated beams with decorated panels between, central wooden bosses with brackets, bronze bosses, decorative corbels with central shields located where trusses meet the walls
- decorative black cornice (unidentified material) at the top of all walls, just under the eiling
- hanging bronze light fixtures with chains
- oak wall paneling
- three artificial Caen stone door surrounds
- double wood and glass entrance doors in southwest entranceway
- decorative and patterned mosaic tile floor
- original windows with decorative horizontal relief panel below the top, single sash
- hallways leading to Edwardian Room have original marble walls, mosaic floors
  - small hall to Palm Court has central, coved and framed opening in ceiling
  - larger hall to 59<sup>th</sup> Street lobby has marble counter with bronze frame above

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The Edwardian Room  
Ceiling and view south



The Edwardian Room  
details

## 59<sup>TH</sup> STREET LOBBY

Architect: Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1905-07

Style: Beaux-Arts

Interior Decoration: L. Alavoine & Co.

Plaster and Stucco: McNulty Bros.

Alterations: Original bronze light fixtures removed; the ceiling above and between the elevator bank and the concierge desk has been simplified by the elimination of the coffers; crystal chandelier; recessed and cove lighting installed; original center doorway has been sealed to permit the installation of the concierge desk; area above the reception desk filled in with matching marble surfaces; display case on the east wall.

The Beaux-Arts style 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby was originally built in 1905-07 from designs by architect Henry J. Hardenbergh. It was decorated by L. Alavoine & Co. of Paris, France. This double-height, U-shaped space, which served as the main entrance until the 1919-21 expansion of the hotel, features a mosaic floor, a coffered plaster ceiling with restrained classical detailing, strikingly-veined white marble walls, Breccia marble pilasters with Corinthian capitals originally decorated with gilt bronze, revolving doors of bronze and oak, lunettes with geometrically-patterned moldings above the entrances and concierge desk, mirrors with geometrically-patterned bronze frames, and elaborate bronze elevator doors separated by piers with applied bronze decoration. The elevator bank is surmounted by a marble panel framed by a rope molding above a course of bronze rosettes that extends around the lobby. The panel is now covered by a tapestry. Similar tapestries fill original marble panels above the reception desk and on the upper walls between the entrances and concierge desk. The tapestries are not significant features. This elaborately-decorated lobby with its French-inspired design provided hotel guests and visitors with a grand first-impression of the Plaza Hotel, and was considered by Hardenbergh to be one of the most significant of the building's public spaces. Contemporary reviews admired the marble walls, the placement of the elevators, and the combination of marble with gilt bronze. Besides changes to the lighting, the elimination of the central door at the entryway, modifications to the reception desk area, and simplification of a portion of the ceiling, the lobby appears to remain largely intact and close to its original 1905-07 appearance.

### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- mosaic floor (1905-07)
- all marble wall surfaces, moldings, and baseboards (1905-07)
- all applied bronze wall decoration (1905-07)
- marble pilasters and capitals (1905-07)
- bronze elevator doors, floor indicators, and their decorative surrounds and hardware (1905-07)
- all moldings above the elevator bank, above the reception desk, and between the entrances (1905-07 and later)
- all decorative metal ventilation grilles on the walls, baseboards, and ceilings (1905-07, and possibly later)

- marble reception counter, framed mirrors above the counter, marble walls behind the counter, and the marble fasciae above the counter, including all bronzed detailing such as roped moldings and rosette bands (after 1912)
- fixed mirrors, located on the upper sections of the walls, with geometrically-patterned bronze frames (1905-07 and possibly later), except for the mirror applied to the now-sealed entrance behind the concierge desk
- revolving doors, including their housing, glass surfaces, ceilings, hardware, and interior wall surfaces (1905-07 and possibly later)
- glass lunettes above the entrances, including their decorative bronze frames (1905-07)
- metal grille doors at the northeast corner of the lobby (date unknown)
- mirrored, bronze service doors on the lobby's east wall, including their hardware (1905-07)
- marble, bronze, and glass mailbox and conduit (possibly 1905-07)
- all plaster ceiling surfaces and moldings (1905-07 and later)
- crystal chandelier (after 1912)
- all ceiling rosettes (possibly 1905-07)
- light fixtures on the north wall (after 1907)

#### References

“Another Fine Hotel Now on the City’s List,” *New York Times* (Sept. 29, 1907), SM3.  
 Eve Brown, *The Plaza* (New York: Meredith Press, 1967). “The Plaza Hotel,” *American Architect and Building News* 92 (Oct. 26, 1907), 134. “The Plaza Hotel,” *Architects’ and Builders’ Magazine*, v. ix, no. 1 (October 1907), 1.

## **FIFTH AVENUE LOBBY AND VESTIBULES**

Architect: Warren & Wetmore, 1919-21; S. Joseph Gilbert, eng., 1944.

Style: neo-Classical

Alterations (since 1921): Mezzanine galleries enclosed and partially removed, matching materials used; display windows installed on the south wall; ceiling pendants removed; moldings above the west arched simplified; crystal chandelier installed; recessed lighting, HVAC; mirrors applied to the pilasters.

The Fifth Avenue Lobby and vestibules were opened in 1921, occupying the space that originally held the main dining room and replacing the 59<sup>th</sup> Street lobby as the hotel's main entrance. Warren & Wetmore's plans called for reducing the width of the former dining area from five to three bays and the length by one bay by placing a U-shaped mezzanine gallery along the north, east and south walls of the room. Three vestibules leading to the Fifth Avenue entrances were placed beneath the east part of the mezzanine. The new lobby was decorated with neo-classical ornament in bas-relief. Warren & Wetmore preserved certain elements from Hardenbergh's 1905-07 dining room, such as the three arched opening on the west side leading to the main corridor and Palm Court and some wall and ceiling surfaces, although the original decorative elements were mostly either simplified, removed, or replaced. Display windows and the entry doors to the current Rose Room were also installed on the south wall of the lobby in 1934. Additional alterations to the space were performed in 1944, including removal of part of the mezzanine above the center bay over the entrance, thus creating a double-height vestibule at that location, and enclosure of the rest of the mezzanine. No architect is associated with this work, but the firm of Frederick P. Platt & Brother did other work at the Plaza in the 1940s, and may have played a part in the design of these alterations. All of these post-1921 alterations employed materials and designs that match Warren & Wetmore's neo-classical design, such as the double-height pilasters, molded panels, eared surrounds, and bas relief. Tapestries have been installed in the framed panels on the upper sections of the walls and in the center entryway. The tapestries are not significant features. The display windows on the lower part of the south wall appear to be a later alteration and are not considered to be significant features. This elaborately-decorated lobby with its classically-inspired design provided hotel guests and visitors with a grand first-impression of the Plaza Hotel. The lobby presently features a mosaic floor (1919-21), paneled pilasters (1905-07 and later), bas relief ornament (1905-07 and later), elaborate wrought-iron at the upper part of the walls (1919-21 and later), beamed ceiling (1905-07), and a crystal chandelier (after 1919-21).

### Descriptive List of Significant Features

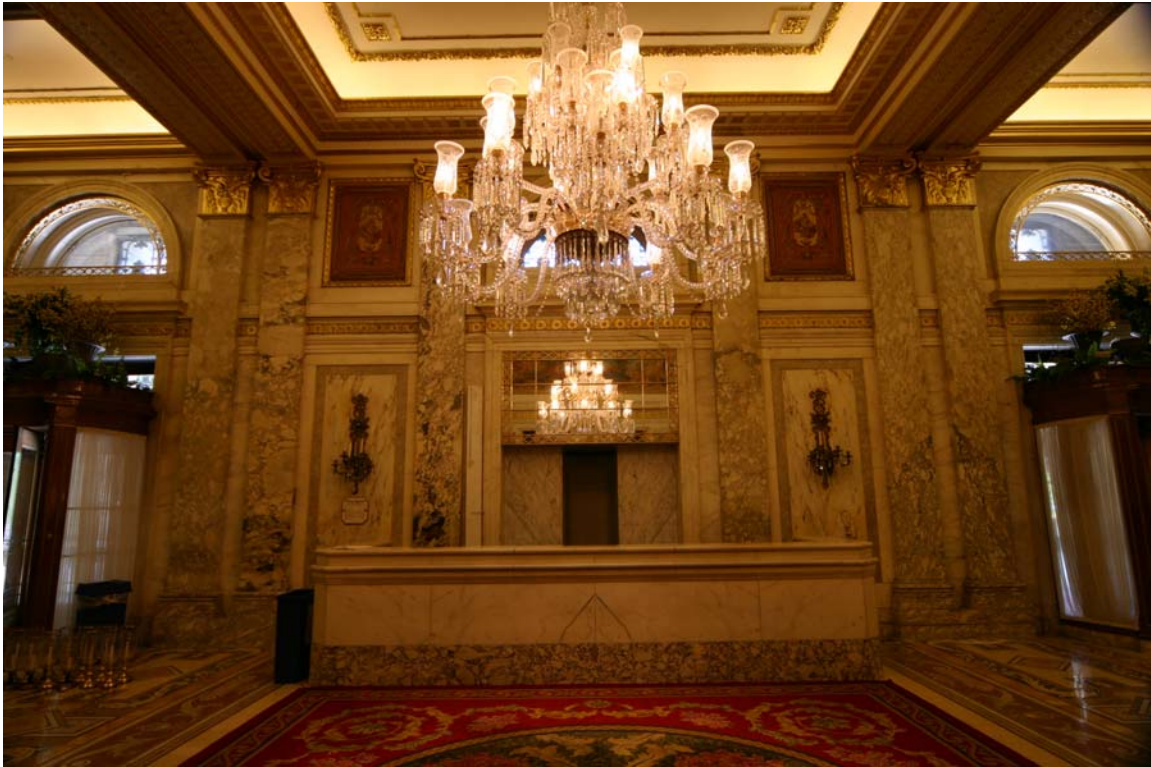
- mosaic floors, including those that may exist beneath the carpets in the vestibules (1919-21)
- all plaster wall surfaces and moldings (1905-07, 1921, 1944)
- all marble baseboards (1919-21)
- all metal railings (1919-21, 1944)
- plaster pilasters and capitals (1905-07, 1919-21, 1944)



- all decorative metal ventilation grilles on the walls and ceilings (1905-07, 1919-21 and possibly later)
- bronze and glass hinged doors located between the lobby and the vestibules, including their hardware and the surmounting clock (possibly 1919-21)
- revolving doors, including their housing, glass surfaces, ceilings, hardware, and interior wall surfaces (possibly 1919-21)
- all plaster ceiling surfaces and moldings (1905-07, 1921)
- crystal chandelier (after 1921)
- all ceiling rosettes (possibly 1905-07, 1919-21 or later)
- all attached mirrors (possibly 1944 or later)
- wood and mirrored-glass doors to the present Rose Room and their hardware possibly 1934)
- wood and glass doors and lunettes between the lobby and the main corridor, including their hardware (1905-07)
- wood and glass casements on the upper walls of the lobby, including their hardware (1944)

#### References

*Architects' and Builders' Magazine*, v. ix, no. 1 (October 1907), 12. "Hotel Plaza Addition, New York, Warren & Wetmore, Architect," *Architecture and Building* v.54 (Feb. 1922), 13-18. New York City Department of Buildings, alterations application ALT 170-1934, ALT 351-1944. *New York Times* (Jan. 31, 1934), 34.



59th Street Lobby  
View south and north



Fifth Avenue Lobby and Vestibules  
View east and west

## GRAND BALLROOM

Architects: Schultze & Weaver (1929)

Style: neo-Classical

At its informal society opening on October 3, 1921, the *New York Times* noted “the ballroom is now said to be the finest in the city.” The formal opening occurred on October 14 with a showing of the motion picture “Peter Ibbetson” to benefit the American Committee for Devastated France and the New York Maternity Center. According to Eve Brown in *The Plaza: Its Life and Times*, “the new ballroom which replaced the original ballroom in 1921, and which was as elegant as the first, with balconies but a stationary stage, immediately became the scene of some of Manhattan’s most glamorous debutante balls. The first of the galas [in December] that year was the coming-out party in honor of Joan Whitney, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Payne Whitney... who became Mrs. Charles Shipman Payson.” This was also the setting of a January 1923 ball given by Mrs. Frederic Neilson for her debutante granddaughter, Cathleen Vanderbilt. The first-story ballroom as originally designed by Warren & Wetmore in 1919-21 was a large two-story, rectangular space with a platform stage set within a rectangular alcove at the western end and a balcony surrounding the northern, southern, and eastern sides on the second story level. It was constructed by the George A. Fuller Co., with plasterwork by P.J. Durcan, Inc., woodwork by the Batavia and New York Woodworking Co.; and decoration, including a paneled ceiling, by John B. Smeraldi.

The Grand Ballroom was totally redesigned by Schultze & Weaver, and reconstructed by the George A. Fuller Co. between June and September 1929, at an estimated cost of \$200,000. In a review of a recital given by opera diva Mary Garden in November 1929 before an audience of 1,000, the *Times* mentioned “the ballroom, redecorated on new lines, without a former balcony, and with boxes added for this season’s subscribers.” The elliptical boxes, with wrought-iron decorative railings, are located along the northern and eastern sides. A rounded apsidal stage alcove replaced the rectangular one. The neo-Classical style room features round-arched openings with fluted Ionic columns and an elaborate ceiling cove with inset coved rondels.

The Grand Ballroom has been the site of countless business, cultural, and social gatherings in the life of New York City. Marie Curie was guest of honor at the annual dinner of the New York City Committee of the American Society for the Control of Cancer (October 1929), and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt appeared here before the Girls Service League (1935). After World War II, “mass debutante balls” took the place of the earlier “individual coming-out dances” of the social elite. As indicated by Eve Brown, “the most exclusive of the debutante events, the Junior Assemblies, as well as the equally fashionable Junior League Debutante Ball, the Grosvenor Debutante Cotillion, and the Gotham Ball, are deeply imbedded in the tradition of the Plaza.” A brief sampling of events held in the Grand Ballroom includes: the December Ball (1946), attended by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his abdication of the English throne; the Mardi Gras pageant of the New York Junior League (1952-65); the first International Debutante Ball (1954); the wedding receptions of two of the daughters of Rose and Joseph Kennedy, Patricia Kennedy and Peter Lawford (1954), and Jean Kennedy and Stephen Smith (1956); the Wild West Ball (1959) attended by Senator and Mrs. John F. Kennedy; the annual benefits for the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Club; the annual New Year’s Eve celebration with Peter Duchin’s orchestra; the presentation of the Elsie de Wolfe Award of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Interior Designers to Philip Johnson (1965); the

wedding reception of Julie Nixon and David D. Eisenhower II (1968); the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala, to benefit the New York Landmarks Conservancy (1982); and the wedding of developer Donald Trump and Marla Ann Maples (1993).

One of the Ballroom's truly legendary events was writer Truman Capote's "little masked ball for Kay Graham and all my friends," as he slyly called it. Later dubbed the "Party of the Century" by the press, this was the Black and White Ball of November 28, 1966, held officially in honor of Katherine Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*. Capote, who chose this venue as "the only really beautiful ballroom left in the United States," required a dress code in which men wore black tie and women white or black gowns, with everyone in masks. Along with the eclectic mix of 540 invited partygoers, the Plaza was thronged by some 200 members of the press covering the event, as well as hundreds of spectators outside. The *New York Times* the next day called the guests "as spectacular a group as has ever been assembled for a private party in New York... an international Who's Who of notables." *Vanity Fair* later called them "a gilt-edged melting pot, the most alluring power brokers in the worlds of high society, politics, the arts, and Hollywood – disconnected universes that collided, if not for the first time that evening, then at least with unprecedented force."

The *Times* reported a restoration of the Ballroom in 1971. DiLeonardo International U.S.A. was hired by Fairmont Hotels for a half-million dollar renovation of the Ballroom in 1993-98 which included trompe l'oeil ceiling painting "with a trellis-like pattern of falling leaves and rose clusters mimicking the carpet pattern."

#### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- round-arched openings with fluted Ionic columns, keystones with heads, mirrored fanlights, and decorative metal bands
- rounded corners with fluted Ionic pilasters and round-arched openings with alcoves with decorative coved ceilings (both alcoves on the north side have wood double exit doors)
- a wide ceiling cove with lower entablature, decorative panels, inset coved rondels, and corner lunettes painted with cherubs; non-historic sconces on entablature
- ceiling with decorative border, two chandeliers set within rondels with decorative borders, center rondel (air conditioning duct) with decorative borders (c. 1940s), and trompe l'oeil painting of roses and leaves around the center rondel and four corners (1990s)
- elliptical boxes along the northern and eastern sides with wrought-iron decorative railings and lower decorative metal grilles
- steps leading from the northwest corner alcove to the northern boxes, arched openings between the boxes, mirrored and paneled walls, and decorative sconces
- steps leading from the northeast corner alcove to the eastern boxes, rectangular openings between the boxes, mirrored and paneled walls, and decorative sconces
- a rounded apsidal alcove on the west end with an elevated stage, fluted Ionic pilasters, ceiling cove with decorative panels with oval rondels (two painted with cherubs), and ceiling with large rondel; non-historic entablature holding curtain

#### References

Plaza Hotel plans (1921). Plaza Hotel archives. "Benefit at Plaza Ballroom Opening," *New York Times (NYT)*, Sept. 29, 1921, 15. "Open Plaza Ballroom: Society Opens Season," *NYT*, Oct. 4, 1921, 11. "Social Notes," *NYT*, Oct. 6, 1921, 13. "Event at Plaza To-night to Aid Welfare

Funds," *New York Tribune*, Oct. 14, 1921. "Society Aids a Benefit," *NYT*, Oct. 15, 1921, 10. "Hotel Plaza Addition, New York," *Architecture and Building* (Feb. 1922), 16-17 and pl. 14. "Mrs. F. Neilson Gives Ball at the Plaza," *NYT*, Jan. 9, 1923, 23. NYC, Dept. of Buildings (Alt. 1039-1929). "Manhattan Plans Filed," *NYT*, May 22, 1929, 48. "Building Contracts Awarded in New York City" and "Plans Filed for Alterations in Manhattan," *Real Estate Record & Builders Guide*, June 1, 1929, 45 and 47. Telephone interview with Janet Parks, Curator of Drawing and Archives, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University (July 2005). "Honor Mme. Curie Tonight," *NYT*, Oct. 31, 1929, 17. "1,000 Hear Mary Garden," *NYT*, Nov. 8, 1929, 25. "President's Wife to Speak on Youth," *NYT*, Nov. 3, 1935, N6. "Forthcoming Debutante Balls Here Recall Cotillions of Earlier Days," *NYT*, Nov. 20, 1955, 93. "Design Prize Goes to Philip Johnson," *NYT*, Mar. 2, 1965, 26. "Capote's Black and White Ball: 'The Most Exquisite of Spectator Sports'," *NYT*, Nov. 29, 1966, 53. "Plaza Plans 'Original Elegance' in 'World of Tomorrow'," *NYT*, Aug. 27, 1971. "The Plaza is the Grand Ballroom," *NYT*, Oct. 3, 1971, advertising suppl. 13. "New York Junior League," [www.jlweb.org](http://www.jlweb.org) website. Eve Brown, *The Plaza: Its Life and Times* (N.Y.: Meredith Pr., 1967), 223-229. Curtis Gathje, *At the Plaza: An Illustrated History of the World's Most Famous Hotel* (N.Y.: St. Martin's Pr., 2002). Amy Fine Collins, "A Night to Remember," *Vanity Fair* (July 1996), 120-139. George Plimpton, *Truman Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances, and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career* (N.Y.: Anchor Bks., 1997), 247-278. "Plaza Design: A Lesson in History," [www.dileonardo.com](http://www.dileonardo.com) website.

## **GRAND BALLROOM CORRIDOR**

Architects: Schultze & Weaver (1929)

Style: neo-Classical

The space that is now the Grand Ballroom Corridor was originally in 1921 two different levels: a corridor on the first story and the southern portion of the balcony of the ballroom on the second story. There were two stairways connecting the levels. In the 1929 redesign of the Grand Ballroom by Schultze & Weaver, the balcony was removed, and this tall barrel-vaulted corridor was created. DiLeonardo International U.S.A. was hired by Fairmont Hotels for a renovation of the Ballroom in 1993-98, which included a trompe l'oeil ceiling painting in the corridor with a trellis pattern and rose border.

### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- west end with double wood doors surmounted by a plain panel and round-arched upper portion with decorative border and wreath
- east end with steps leading to a square alcove (with wrought-iron railings similar to the railings on the Grand Ballroom boxes), flanked by colossal grey marble Composite columns (above which is a round-arched upper wall portion with decorative border and wreath), steps leading to the eastern end boxes of the Grand Ballroom (with wrought-iron railings similar to the railings on the Grand Ballroom boxes), and round-arched opening with wood double doors and fanlight covered with wood
- rectangular (north wall) and elliptical-arched (south wall) openings surmounted by decorative panels and flanked by grey marble Composite pilasters that support a high molded entablature
- paneled walls with lower decorative metal grilles, those on the south wall with framed tapestry panels
- south wall elliptical-arched openings have marble paneled reveals, double wood-and-mirrored doors, and multi-paned mirrored fanlights
- barrel-vaulted ceiling with double decorative panels at each end, central section with a trompe l'oeil painting with a trellis pattern and rose border (1990s), central rondel, and 3 chandeliers

## GRAND BALLROOM FOYER

attributed to 1964-65

Style: neo-Classical

What is today the Grand Ballroom Foyer was originally in 1921 two distinct spaces: a ballroom foyer to the north, and a stair hall to the south, the latter having a decorative timbered ceiling (undoubtedly related to the surviving ceiling of the adjacent stairs) and rectangular openings framed by ornamental surrounds with pilasters and columns. The design of the foyer in 1921 is currently unknown. The current Foyer was apparently created by combining the two spaces in 1964-65. As explained in the *New York Times* by then-general manager Alphonse W. Salomone in 1964, "people who took the ballroom for large parties used the Terrace Room for receptions. Soon they'll be able to use the enlarged foyer." The inspiration for the design appears to have been the adjacent Grand Ballroom Corridor.

### Descriptive List of Significant Features

#### *Northern Portion*

- grey and turquoise marble paneled pilasters with metal ornament (musical instrument motif) and sconces that support a decorative anthemion motif molding
- elliptical-arched openings with keystones: with marble paneled reveals (center); with wood and mirror-paneled doors and mirror-paneled fanlights (north wall); and with metal and mirror-paneled doors and mirror-paneled fanlights (east and west walls)
- marble floor
- east end rectangular alcove flanked by marble paneled piers with metal ornament (musical instrument motif) and sconces, grey and turquoise marble wall panels surmounted by panels with relief figural ornament, and a paneled ceiling with rondels
- west wall rectangular openings surmounted by panels with relief figural ornament, with marble paneled reveals (south) and metal and mirror-paneled doors (north)
- ceiling with oval coved rondel with decorative border, chandelier, and corners with musical instrument motif ornament

#### *Southern Portion*

- grey and turquoise marble paneled pilasters with metal ornament (musical instrument motif) and sconces that support a decorative anthemion motif molding
- marble floor
- east end with 3 elliptical-arched openings with keystones and mirrors
- west end with round-arched openings with keystones and metal-framed fanlights, and with large window (north) and bronze entrance enframing with glass double doors (south)
- south wall with 3 rectangular windows with molded surrounds and paneled reveals, set within elliptical arches with marble panels, and window seats and decorative metal grilles
- ceiling with decorative bands and 4 rondels

### References

Plaza Hotel plans (1921). Plaza Hotel archives. "Hotel Plaza Addition, New York," *Architecture and Building* (Feb. 1922), 16-17 and pl. 15. "Plaza Pressing Expansion Drive," *New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1964, 43.





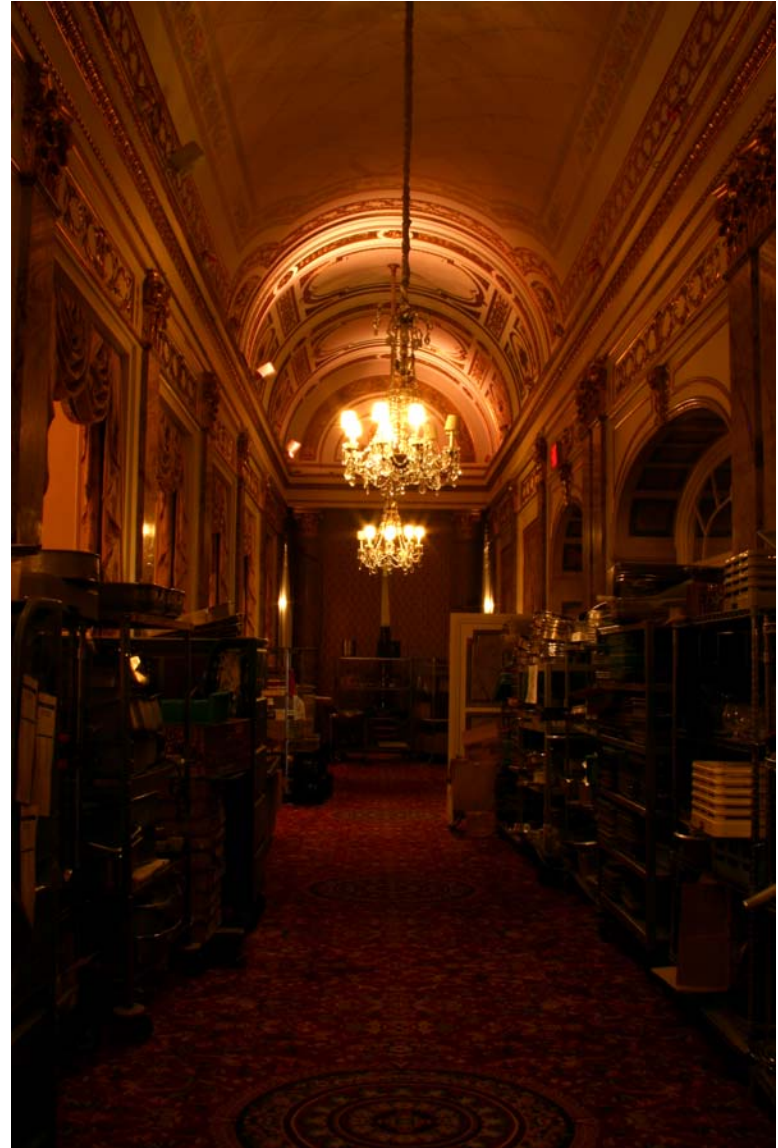
Grand Ballroom  
view west and east



Grand Ballroom  
stage and ceiling details



Grand Ballroom Foyer  
North section (view east) and south section (view west)



Grand Ballroom (northwest) and Grand Ballroom Corridor (view east)

## **MAIN CORRIDORS (North, East and South Passageways)**

Architects: Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1905-07; Warren & Wetmore, 1919-21.

Style: Beaux Arts

Interior Decoration: L. Alavoine & Co. (1905-07)

Plaster and Stucco: McNulty Bros. (1905-07)

Alterations: Reconfiguration of the original circulation pattern; original bronze light fixtures removed; crystal chandeliers and cove lighting installed; changes to the storefronts in the section of the corridor behind the 59<sup>th</sup> Street lobby and elevator bank; area above the reception desk filled in with matching marble surfaces; gilt applied to the ceiling moldings; removal of some stairways, and alterations to the stairwell openings; display window installed on the east corridor across from the Palm Court; stair alcove at the south end of the east corridor filled in with non-historic glass and metal door and show window; southernmost arch in the east corridor filled in with paneled wood walls and door; former stairwell opening on the north corridor across from the entryway to the Oak Room filled in with non-historic glass and metal door and glass wall; display cases were inserted into the wall in the north corridor across from the storefronts; HVAC.

The Beaux-Arts-style main corridor was originally built in 1905-07 from designs by architect Henry J. Hardenbergh and was partially altered during the 1919-21 enlargement of the hotel by architects Warren & Wetmore. This richly-embellished passageway winds its way through the hotel's ground floor clearly and easily linking all the major spaces of the ground floor and creating a variety of vistas as it passes through the east side of the Palm Court and connects the two lobbies before ending at the stairway to the Terrace Room. It features ornate mosaic floors, decorated plaster ceilings with restrained classical detailing, strikingly-veined white marble walls, Breccia marble pilasters with Corinthian capitals decorated with gilt bronze, mirrors with geometrically-patterned bronze frames, Corinthian columns at the Palm Court, arched doorways that open into the Fifth Avenue lobby and the Palm Court, and various stairways leading to the mezzanine and first story. The east passageway, which passes between the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue lobby and the Palm Court, appears little changed from 1905-07. The north and south passageways were altered in 1919-21 to accommodate the ground floor's changed layout, including alterations to the north passageway's plan at its west end, removal of the stairs at the same location, the installation of a set of stairs at the west end of the south passageway leading to the Terrace Room, filling-in of the area above the 59<sup>th</sup> Street lobby reception counter with matching marble surfaces and mirrors, and the elimination of service counters behind the 59<sup>th</sup> Street lobby and their replacement with storefronts. Other changes include the removal of the original bronze light fixtures (after 1907), the installation of crystal chandeliers near the Palm Court (after 1921), and the insertion of cove and recessed lighting (possibly late-twentieth century), additional storefront alterations (at various times), and gilding of the ceiling (possibly mid- to late-twentieth century). Tapestries have been installed in the some of the framed panels on the upper sections of the walls. The tapestries are not significant features. Portions of the mosaic tile floor still follow the 1905-07 plan, passing around obstacles since removed or passing under partitions since added. Openings in the mezzanine level of the curving staircases at the northeast and southeast of the corridors and at the west end of the north corridor have

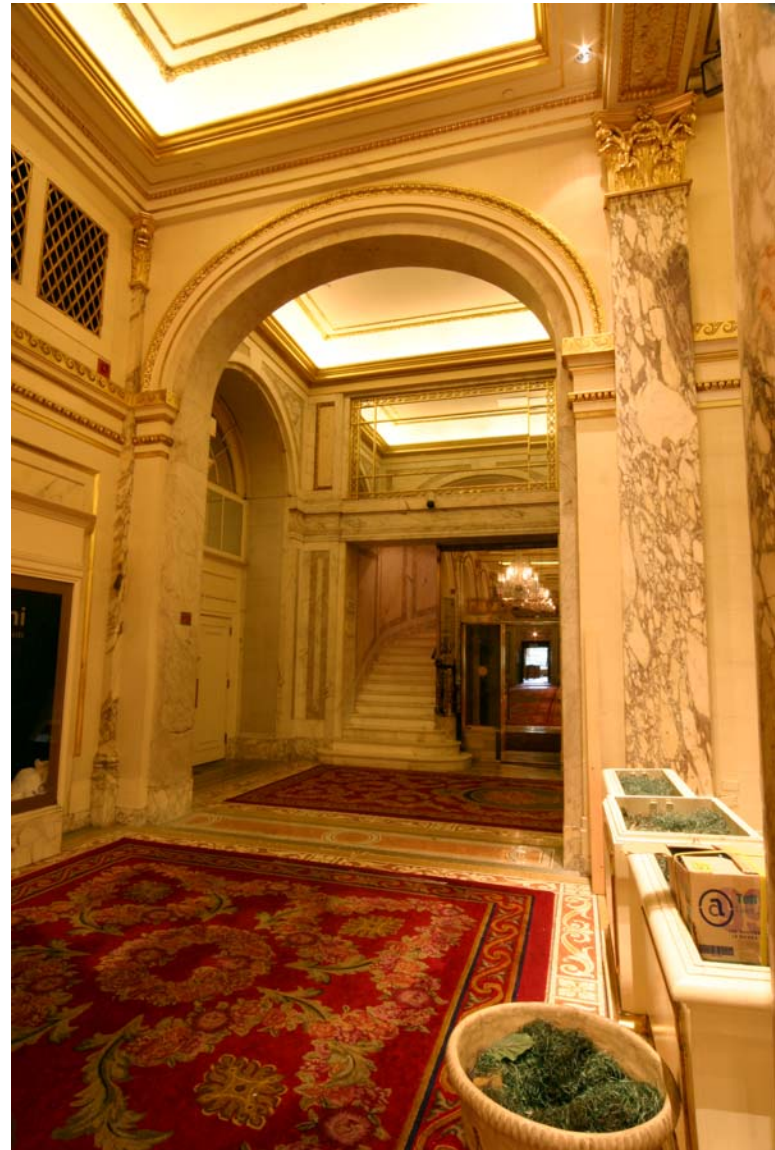
been filled in. The Plaza's wide and elaborately-decorated passageways, with their French-inspired design that remain largely intact, enabled hotel guests and visitors to easily progress through the hotel's ground floor en route to its series of grand lobbies, restaurants, and lounges.

#### Descriptive List of Significant Features

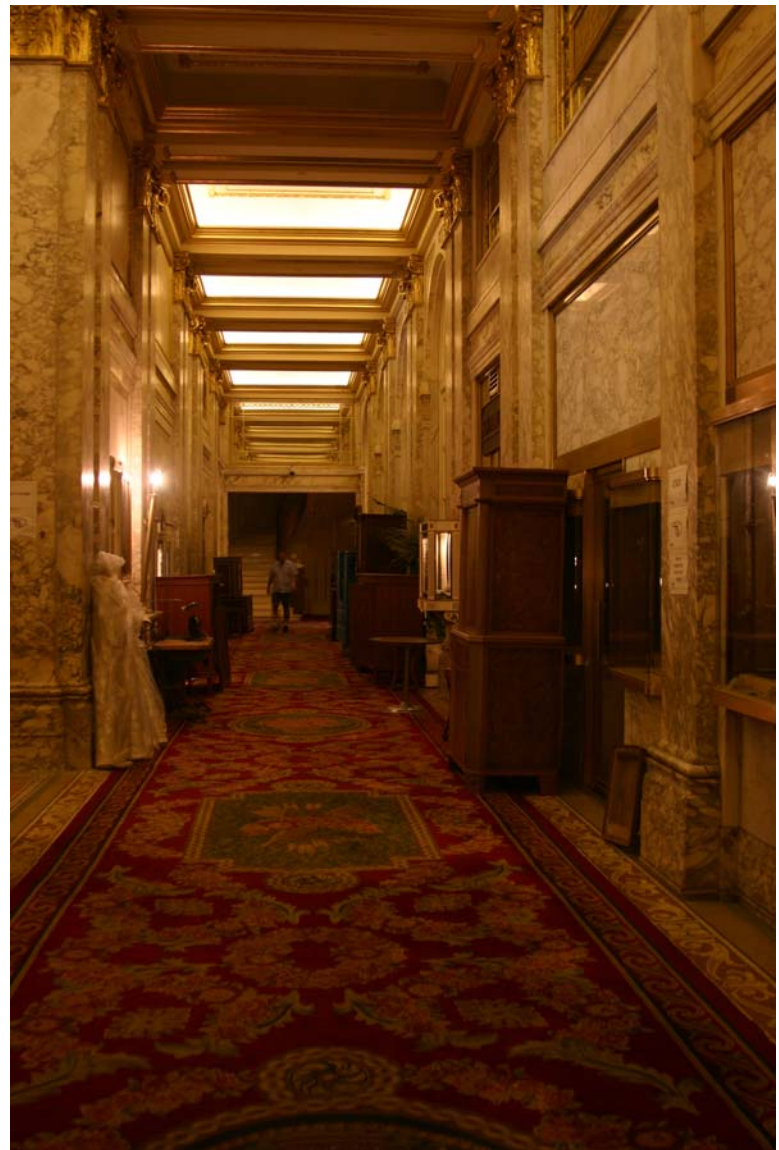
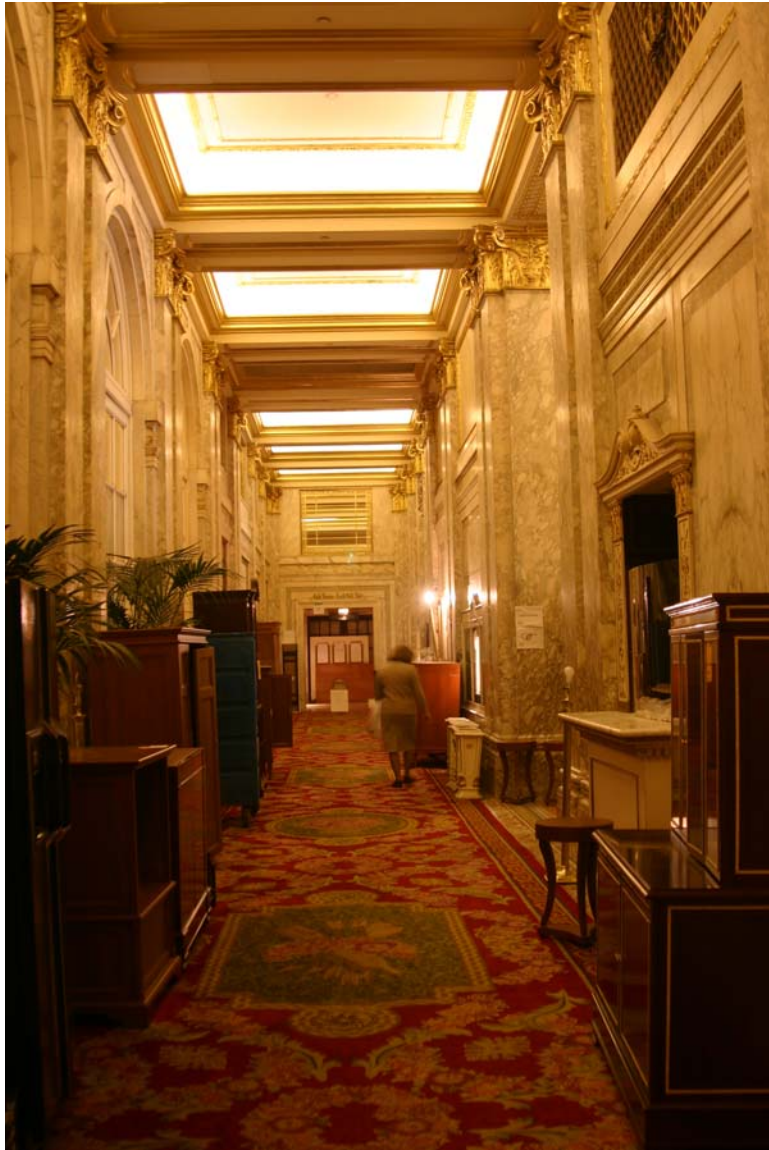
- mosaic floors (1905-07)
- all marble and plaster wall surfaces, moldings, and baseboards (1905-07, 1919-21)
- all applied bronze wall decoration (1905-07, 1919-21)
- marble pilasters and capitals (1905-07)
- all decorative metal ventilation grilles on the walls, baseboards, and ceilings (1905-07, 1919-21 and possibly later)
- marble reception counter, framed mirrors above the counter, marble walls behind the counter, and the marble fasciae above the counter, including all bronzed detailing such as roped moldings and rosette bands (after 1912)
- mirrors, located on the upper sections of the walls, with geometrically-patterned bronze frames (1905-07 and possibly later)
- all plaster ceiling surfaces and moldings (1905-07 and possibly later)
- all marble staircases and their brass railings, banisters, wall, ceilings, and light fixtures (1905-07 and possibly later)
- crystal chandeliers (after 1912)
- all ceiling rosettes (by 1921)
- decorative brass ceiling lamps in the west passageway outside of the Oak Room/Bar (possibly 1905-07)
- paneled wood doors, transoms and hardware to the Oak Bar (possibly 1905-07)
- paneled wood-and-glass doors to the Oak Room and to the 59<sup>th</sup> Street entryway (possibly 1905-07)
- paneled wood service doors in the north corridor (after 1921)
- French doors and fanlights between the corridors and the Palm Court and the Fifth Avenue lobby (1905-07) with their hardware
- marble, wood, and metal mantle in the north corridor, including its decorative surround and hood (after 1907)
- Corinthian columns at the Palm Court (1905-07)
- marble stairs and bronze railings leading to the upper floors (1905-07)

#### References

"The Plaza Hotel," *The American Architect and Building News* (October 26, 1907). *Real Estate Record and Guide* (Nov. 19, 1907), 746.



Main Corridors  
General view and south corner



Main Corridors  
View west and east





Main Corridors  
West end and 59th Street passage

## **THE OAK BAR** (originally Brokers Offices)

Architect: Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1905-07

Style: Tudor Revival or Jacobethan Revival

Interior Decoration: Ferdinand Schaettler, 1905-07

Redecoration/Alterations: Frederic P. Platt & Brother? 1944-45

The Oak Bar is located in the northwest corner of the hotel. Plans of the hotel, dating to 1907, do not identify the use of this space, but indicate that it was originally divided into two rooms by a non-structural wall (immediately east of the center pillars). The *New York Times* wrote in September 1907: “Conveniently arranged at the end of the hotel are the branch offices of six large stock brokerage houses. In their fittings these are among the handsomest in the city. Every detail would contribute to the comfort of patrons has been provided. As an instance of the quality of the work done by F. Schaettler in fitting out these offices, the mahogany stock board in one of these offices cost \$1,500.” Little is known about Ferdinand Schaettler, who was an interior decorator or cabinet maker. The office on the west side had a private entrance from 59<sup>th</sup> Street. Between 1912 and 1920 the rooms may have been used as part of the adjoining Men’s Bar (later the Oak Room). During prohibition the bar was closed and the rooms again became offices. Plans, dated 1921, show walls engaged with the four free-standing pillars. The east office, off the main corridor, was divided into one large room and five smaller spaces. The smaller west office, entered from 59<sup>th</sup> Street or the Café (now the Oak Room), was divided into one large room and two smaller spaces. Up until 1944, some or all of these rooms housed an office of the brokerage firm E. F. Hutton & Company, which leased space in the hotel from 1916 to 1957.

Hilton purchased the Plaza in August 1943. Many residents of the hotel were wary of his intentions and he wrote in his memoir *Be My Guest* that “to break the ice . . . we gave them back the Oak Bar.” Frederic P. Platt & Brother supervised alterations to the building during the mid-1940s and it seems likely that the firm worked on this project. The Oak Bar reopened as a single, undivided space in January 1945. A writer in the *New Yorker* magazine commented: “A change of which we approve is the reopening, this week, of the Oak Bar. The Oak Bar necessarily went out of existence when prohibition came in, and its large site has since been occupied by a broker’s office. Now, with sable-dyed oak walls, sofas covered in what was described to us as “crimson novelty fabrics,” and three paintings by Everett Shinn, the Oak Bar plans, in the sound Plaza tradition, to stage the comeback it might just as well have staged eight or ten years ago.”

It cannot be determined whether the dark paneling and plaster ceiling was new, restored, or recreated to match the character of an earlier decorative program. It is worth noting that where exit signs are hung, the moldings have been arranged as frames. Significant changes included the 38-foot-long oak wood bar (and the room behind it) that was constructed at the center of the south wall (closing off the double doors that originally linked the space to the Oak Room) and the conversion of the 59<sup>th</sup> Street entrance into a window at the west end of the room. Two large multi-pane mirrors were hung between the three main windows on the north side. A colorful patterned linoleum floor was also installed. It was removed by the 1980s and the floor is now fumed white oak.

Hilton also commissioned three large canvas murals by the painter Everett Shinn (1876-1953) that illustrate nocturnal winter scenes of Central Park (west wall, south alcove), the Pulitzer Fountain (centered over the bar – south wall), and the Cornelius Vanderbilt II house (1879-82, 1892-94, demolished), with a section of the hotel visible (east wall, north of entrance). A member of the “Ashcan School,” Shinn was a successful painter, illustrator and muralist, whose work was frequently exhibited in New York City during the 1940s, at both Ferargil Gallery on 57<sup>th</sup> Street, and the American British Art Center on West 56<sup>th</sup> Street. In August 1944, *Art News* reported that an earlier view of the hotel at night, dating from 1930, had been acquired by a Philadelphia collector. This pastel may have provided inspiration for the Oak Bar commission. In February 1945, a month after the bar reopened, the *New York Sun* reported that Shinn was “well on the way” to completing the third mural. Western International, which acquired the hotel in the mid-1970s, briefly considered “giving them away for a tax deduction.” In an editorial, the *New York Times* commented: “Someone at Western thinks they look better on the books than on the hotel’s walls.” Evergreene Painting Studios restored the paintings in 2001, removing a “dark and yellowing layer of varnish, nicotine stains, and occasional splatters of beer.”

Modest but sensitive changes have been undertaken since the 1940s. Lighting fixtures have been hung on the walls and pillars. The ceiling above the passage to the Oak Room has been dropped to accommodate additional air conditioning ducts and a television cabinet has been installed at the north end of the bar.

#### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- dark wood paneling with small decorative reliefs
- four free-standing wood pillars
- dark wood entrance door with glass panes
- decorative plaster ceiling (not above the alcoves at west end)
- oak wood bar with brass fittings (c. 1945)
- three large canvas murals by Everett Shinn (1944-45)
- lighting fixtures on walls, brown metal plates, with two shaded bulbs (after 1945)
- metal up lights on each side of the four pillars (after 1945)
- wood floor, fumed white oak (1980s)

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The Oak Bar  
View south and east

## **THE OAK ROOM** (originally Men's Bar or Bar-room, later the Café or Lounge)

Architect: Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1905-07

Style: German Renaissance Revival

Interior decoration: possibly Henri Louis Bouche, L. Alavoine & Co., or E.F. Pooley

Alterations: removal of bar at west end (c. 1921), north and south entrances at east end converted to kitchen space and coat check room (1934?).

Of the various public rooms in the Plaza Hotel, the Oak Room is among the best preserved. Designed by Hardenbergh in the German Renaissance Revival style, the Men's Bar or Bar-room opened in 1907. His collaborators may have included Henri Louis Bouche, of Allard & Fils, or the decorators L. Alavoine & Co. and E. F. Pooley. Bouche worked with McKim, Mead & White and was responsible for the woodwork and other features in the Payne Whitney house. Alavoine & Co. were antique dealers and decorators, with offices at Fifth Avenue and 55<sup>th</sup> Street. Pooley was an interior decorator and furniture maker.

Paneled in dark stained wood, reportedly Flemish or British oak – possibly the same material used for the tomb of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey -- claims have been made by various writers that the Oak Room was the architect's favorite room in the hotel. In 1907, the *New York Times* reported: "At the end of the corridor, and to the rear of the office is the barroom – unique among the countless elaborate barrooms of this city. Like all other rooms in the hotel, this is laid out on a generous scale. The style is German Renaissance. Paneled woodwork in dull antique finish covers the walls. High overhead is a vaulted ceiling, the arches of which are sprung from massive pilasters. The major part of the floor is occupied by small tables, café style. At the further end of the room is the bar, which is placed between two heavy wooden columns supporting ceiling arches. This position removes the obtrusive appearance of the usual bar. In the wall space between the three arches over the back of the bar are three oil frescoes of German feudal castles. Each of these castles is atop of a high hill, and is surrounded by an illimitable sky distance. As one enters the room this background gives a pleasing impression of a far-away landscape."

Of the three entrances originally located on the east side of the room, only the central entrance, with a pair of gridded glass doors, remains in use. The south opening has been absorbed into the kitchen and the north opening (enclosed with dark stained wood panels) became a cloakroom, accessed from the corridor. The painter responsible for these murals has not been identified. Below these three paintings was the original location of the bar or service area. Decorative elements related to the consumption of alcohol include deeply-carved oval reliefs resembling wine casks, figures in repose, and a brass chandelier festooned with grapes and a single figure hoisting a tankard. The critic H. W. Frohne wrote in 1907 that the overall effect was "pleasing" but that, along with the Cafe (now the Edwardian Room) it lacked "the quality of being also amusing and diverting." Alterations to the north side of the room, involving the installation of two partial perpendicular walls and two paneled passageways, probably date from the period when the Oak Bar reopened in January 1945 or possibly later.

When prohibition began in January 1920 the bar was removed and the room became known as the Café or Oak Lounge. During this period, or perhaps earlier, an

electric fountain was installed at the center of the mosaic floor, causing minor damage to the tesserae. At some point, there may have also been a stock ticker. The room was converted into a restaurant, called the Oak Room, in 1934. In subsequent years, the club-like interior was especially popular with the theater crowd, particularly the producers Sam H. Harris and George M. Cohan, who frequently dined with friends under the north niche. A plaque, honoring Cohan, was installed on April 24, 1946.

Under the ownership of Conrad Hilton, alterations to the room were contemplated but not carried out. Frank Lloyd Wright, according to Brendan Gill, convinced Hilton to spare both the Oak Room and Edwardian Room in 1953. During this era, women were only admitted on evenings and weekends. This policy was reportedly suggested by Dr. Alfred E. Cohn, a resident of the hotel, who asked if “it might still be possible, in this city of my birth, to experience the joys that my forebears and I were accustomed to.” Protests organized by the National Organization of Women and Betty Freidan during February 1969 eventually brought an end to this policy.

Many writers have admired the Oak Room’s fine state of preservation. On the hotel’s seventy-fifth birthday in 1982, the architecture critic Paul Goldberger wrote in the *New York Times* that “Indeed, of the hotel’s dining rooms, only the Oak Room, the grandiose two-story interior space that feels like a cross between a German castle and a wooden cave, is still in its original form.”

#### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- dark wood paneling set on low green marble base (all walls), embellished with fluted pilasters, low decorative and figurative relief, painted wood shields between arches
- plaster ceiling, raised moldings form large central rectangle, 8 lighting fixtures (originally four bulbs, later covered by glass shade) at each corner; pointed plaster arches rise from wall bays, minor damage to south side above central bay and in northeast corner; brass chandelier hangs at center, festooned with grapes and a single figure holding a tankard, glass shades
- round arches (north, south & east walls) with metal balustrades, dark-colored grid of mullions and mirrors, surmounted by dark-stained wood relief with painted shield
- west wall: three barrel-vaulted niches spring from two pairs of wood pillars; vaults divided by grid of decorative moldings, each bay is decorated with oval wood relief of a wine cask, flanked by decorative reliefs with male and female heads viewed in profile; above each cask is a wood shield set into a decorative relief and a mural of a castle on a hill; north corner niche has bronze plaque dedicated to George M. Cohan; plaque from center niche is missing
- east wall (connects to main corridor): pair of wood doors with glass windows and metal handles, doors framed by molding, gilded later; historic clock set into balustrade
- north wall: center bay has a pair of dark stained wood doors with mirror glass windows; doors framed by molding, gilded later; east and west bays have paneled passages that connect to Oak Bar
- mosaic floor with decorative band at edge, minor modifications at center
- wood enclosures at southeast, northeast, and southwest corners (c. 1934?)
- wall sconces with shields and griffins, five bulbs with shades

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The Oak Room  
View west and east





The Oak Room  
Chandelier and west wall details

## **THE PALM COURT** (originally Tea Room)

Architect: Henry Hardenbergh (1905-07)

Style: neo-Classical

Interior Decoration: E. Spencer Hall & Co.; Caryatids, Pottier & Stymus

Alterations: West wall and westernmost bays of the north and south walls altered (1920-21); ceiling replaced (1944-45)

The Palm Court, originally the Tea Room, was commissioned by hotel operator, Frederic Sterry, who was inspired by the success of the Palm Court tea room (aka the Winter Garden) in London's fashionable Carlton Hotel. (Arthur Davis of Mewès and Davis, 1901, demolished). Designed in the neo-Classical style by architect Henry Hardenbergh with interior decoration by E. Spencer & Hall & Co., the Palm Court is separated from the east arm of the main corridor by a colonnade of marble columns and was located opposite the Plaza Restaurant (removed in the 1920s to create the Grand Army Plaza entrance) with which it functioned *en suite*. The Palm Court features the same restrained classical articulation as the main corridor which wraps around three sides of the room. The corridor is visible through the colonnade and through plate glass doors in the large arched openings on the north and south sides of the room. The walls of the Palm Court are faced with Caen stone (possibly artificial) and are articulated as arcades. The side walls are accented with a giant order of highly polished strikingly-veined marble pilasters topped by gilded or perhaps gold painted bronze capitals. On the west wall the arches are supported by marble caryatids supplied by the decorators Pottier & Stymus. These figures depict the Four Seasons and were copied from originals on the loggia of the seventeenth century Palazzo Pisani in Carrara, Italy. The caryatids originally framed mirrored walls which were replaced by mirrored folding doors when the Terrace Room was constructed in the 1920s. It is not known if the original floor "laid with white marble squares, divided off by brass rods about a half inch in width," survives beneath the present wall-to-wall carpet. The room retains its original elaborately detailed cornice and transverse beams; however, the original coffered ceiling and central stained glass domical vault were replaced by a shallow coffered ceiling with built in air conditioning louvers and indirect lighting in 1944. Hilton probably was also responsible for installing the crystal *girondelle* hurricane lamps on Louis XV pedestals that have become one of the signature elements of the Palm Court.

Filled with palm trees and delicate Liberty Style easy chairs and small tables and lit by "six bronze candelabra of ornate design," the new tea room quickly attracted a fashionable, mostly female, clientele. Within a few weeks of the hotel's opening, it became the site of a minor scandal when a guest, the British actress, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, broke social conventions by smoking in public, an event which brought headlines and earned the hotel a reputation for slightly *outré* fashionableness. By 1908, the tea room was also being used for dining, with an orchestra providing music for both the dinner hour and afternoon tea. In 1908 and 1909 the *New York Times* carried accounts of American heiresses Gladys Vanderbilt and Theodora Shonts having tea with their titled European fiancés, of an evening concert in the tea room attended by the Duchesses of Marlborough, and of a supper given by Newport Society leader and mining heiress Mrs. Herman (Theresa Fair) Oelrichs. During the 1920s, the tea room, which

served as a main point of entry to the Terrace Room Restaurant (built 1919-21), functioned as a restaurant, although it continued to serve tea during the late afternoon. Newspapers increasingly referred to the space as the “palm court” and it was the setting for a scene in Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby*. By 1935, when it was the site of a birthday celebration for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the room was officially called the Palm Court. During the early 1940s, the Palm Court continued to specialize in afternoon tea accompanied by “a string ensemble’s soothing music” and was a favorite of “matrons weary of shopping.” In 1944, Conrad Hilton’s concerns about the deteriorating condition of the skylight vault which had also become less effective after the construction of the 1921 annex and desire to introduce air conditioning in the room led him to have the skylight removed and a new drop ceiling installed. The Palm Court restaurant closed and reopened in 1944 as the Court Lounge, but the name never won popular acceptance and was soon dropped. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the Palm Court continued to serve high tea and was a fashionable luncheon spot favored by President Harry Truman and his daughter Margaret as well as numerous debutantes and their beaux. Increasingly, it also served as an ancillary space for large events taking place in the Terrace Room, including one memorable evening in 1949 when it was “the Paddock” for a two year filly auctioned off to benefit the Ellin Prince Speyer Animal Hospital at the Mid-Winter Ball in the Terrace Room. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Palm Court was the setting for scenes in the movies *Funny Girl* and *The Sterile Cuckoo*. It became a preferred locale for celebrity interviews and events and continued to be favored by “Park Avenue ladies coming for lunch”--Nan Kempner “was crazy about the Palm Court [and] used to have [the] cottage cheese-and-something salad ... every day.” It continued to serve these functions until the hotel closed in 2005.

#### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- all Caen stone (possibly artificial) and plaster wall surfaces, moldings, and baseboards (1905-07)
- all marble columns and pilasters with bronze capitals (now gilded or painted), (1905-07)
- west wall triple arch surround with marble caryatids depicting the Four Seasons, plaster archivolt moldings, plaster and applied bronze spandrel decoration (1905-07)
- marble steps (west wall) leading to the Terrace Room (1919-21)
- fielded panel decoration and decorative bronze ventilation grilles on end bays of the west wall (1905-07)
- molded wood surrounds, paired wood and glass doors with decorative metal handle plates and hardware, and wood and glass fanlights north and south walls (1905-07)
- molded wood surrounds, folding wood and mirrored glass doors and wood and mirrored glass fanlights west wall (1919-21)
- all molded plaster cornices (1905-07)
- decorative plasterwork on the soffits of the two east-west transverse beams framing the center section of the ceiling (1905-07)
- all decorative metal light sconces (c. 1919-21 or later)

- crystal hurricane lamps on Louis XV pedestals (c. 1943)
- marble floor tiles with brass spacer strips (1905-07), if extant beneath carpet

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The Palm Court  
View west and east



Palm Court  
details

## **TERRACE ROOM** (originally Restaurant)

Architect: Warren & Wetmore

Style: neo-Renaissance

Interior Decoration: John B. Smeraldi

Plaster: P.J. Durcan, Inc.

Alterations: Replacement, at the floor of the main portion of the room, and at the openings in the arcade wall between the main portion of the room and the balcony, of the original balustrades with wood balustrades (before 1946); replacement, at the mirrors on the north wall, of the original false balustrades with wood false balustrades (before 1946); installation, above the pilasters on the north wall, and above the pilasters on the north side of the arcade wall, of metal up-light fixtures (after 1946); installation, within the niche at the western end of the room, of a canvas painting by W. Mensching of Evergreene Studio (1990); removal, from the ceiling of the balcony arcade, of the original chandeliers, and the installation of four chandeliers (date unknown); removal, from the seven mirrors on the north wall, of the original wall sconces (date unknown); installation, in the main portion of the Terrace Room, on the west wall between the southernmost mirror and the arcade wall, of paired metal can lights (date unknown); installation of illuminated "Exit" box signs, emergency light fixtures, electrical outlets, and other non-historic features at various wall locations (date unknown); creation of ceiling penetrations and the installation of recessed lighting (date unknown); replacement, or alteration of, the circular metal ceiling grille located between the two westernmost chandeliers in the main portion of the Terrace Room (date unknown); replacement of three sets of original mirrored doors at the east wall with paired wood doors (date unknown); installation of new doors and a new metal door surround at the door opening in the west wall of the balcony (date unknown).

With the removal, in the 1919-21 renovation, of the Plaza's main dining room, Warren & Wetmore designed a new restaurant located to the west of the Palm Court. Today, the Terrace Room, which may have taken its name from an outdoor dining area formerly located at the Plaza, or from the room's terraced floor levels, retains nearly all of its original features. Split roughly into thirds, lengthwise, by two sets of balustrades flanking low stairs, the main portion of the Terrace Room is connected to a low balcony to its south by stairs at its eastern and western ends. In the main portion of the room, the north wall, with its seven round-headed recesses, and the balcony's arcade wall, featuring seven large round-headed openings, essentially mirror each other. The floor of the Terrace Room, which has been covered with carpet since its opening, is of unknown material.

Among the more notable features of the room's main portion are its three chandeliers, which appear to be original; the rusticated marble of the wall bases; and the shell-headed fountain set in front of a niche in the west wall. The richly decorated soffits and walls – particularly the cherub-covered pilasters – and the ceiling, with its mirrored panels and painted depictions of classically inspired figures and picturesque classical ruins, appear to be the work of the renowned interior decorator John B. (Giovanni Battista) Smeraldi (1867-1947). Smeraldi, who also worked on New York's Grand Central Terminal (Warren & Wetmore and Reed & Stem, 1903-1913, a designated New

York City Landmark), as well as another Warren & Wetmore project, the Erlanger (now St. James) Theater (1926-27, a designated New York City Landmark), decorated the interiors of a number of houses for Vanderbilt family members. Drawn to Los Angeles in 1921 to work on the Biltmore Hotel (Schultze & Weaver, 1923) there, he remained in Southern California until his death. Other buildings with Smeraldi interiors include Quebec City's Chateau Frontenac (Bruce Price, 1892-93), and the Pasadena (Calif.) Civic Auditorium (Edwin Bergstrom, 1931-32). Smeraldi's hand also appears to be visible in the painted, coffered ceiling of the Plaza's Mezzanine Foyer; in the painted ceiling of the stairway linking the Mezzanine Foyer and the ground floor; and in the painted, beamed ceiling over the staircase that leads from the Mezzanine Foyer to the Grand Ballroom Foyer. This last ceiling is similar in character to one that Smeraldi would later design for the Santa Barbara County Courthouse (William Mooser III, 1929) in California.

Trompe l'oeils and other painted art work, also likely by Smeraldi, are present in the balcony area of the Terrace Room, on the walls, paneled double doors, and transom panels, and on paneled surfaces that were painted and molded to appear as double doors. Hanging from the groin-like vaulted ceiling of the balcony area are four chandeliers that appear to be neither the original chandeliers nor the later, apparently metal chandeliers that are visible in an undated historic photograph by Ezra Stoller.

Following World War II, the Terrace Room became a popular site for fashion shows (particularly in the 1940s and 1950s), and for wedding receptions, celebrity gatherings, and public events. In 1949, it hosted the wedding reception of the legendary figure skater Sonja Henie and Winthrop Gardiner Jr.; in 1952, *Today* show host Dave Garroway and singing star Marguerite Piazza interviewed "well-known personalities" in the Terrace Room during NBC's coverage of the Fifth Avenue Easter Parade. Four years later, more than 200 actors and other entertainers including Judy Garland, Carol Channing, Helen Hayes, and the Gish sisters would gather there for a dance. The Terrace Room has hosted many memorable press conferences over the years, including Marilyn Monroe's famous "broken strap" press conference to promote the film *The Prince and the Showgirl*, in 1956; the Beatles' appearance on the day following their American television debut on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, in 1964; a televised press conference in 1967 by Joseph Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, who had recently defected from the Soviet Union; and a promotional appearance by Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton for their film, *Doctor Faustus*, in 1968. In 1976, the Terrace Room was the site of Major League Baseball's first free-agent draft, described by writer Joseph Durso as "the first mass auction of talent in the sport's history."

### Descriptive List of Significant Features

#### *Main portion of Terrace Room*

- all marble features, including the low walls that divide the main portion of the Terrace Room into thirds; the bases of the north and west walls, and of the northern face of the arcade wall; the side walls of the staircases at the western end of the room; and the decorative doorway surrounds on the north wall and on the north face of the arcade wall, at the eastern end of the room;
- all balustrades and false balustrades;
- all chandeliers;



- all mirrors;
- the fountain set in front of the niche in the west wall;
- the two floor lamps with candelabras in front of the west wall, flanking the two outer mirrors;
- the seven round-headed openings in the arcade wall, the seven round-headed recesses in the north wall, and the two recesses in the west wall;
- all decorative plaster- and wood-work on the walls, including that within the niche in the west wall; within the blind doorway on the north wall at the eastern end of the main portion of the room, and the decorative overdoor above; the overdoor on the north face of the arcade wall, over the door opening at the eastern end; the door surround, pediment, and cartouche on the north wall at the western end; the surround, pediment, and cartouche on the northern face of the arcade wall at the western end; the pilasters and pilaster capitals; and all moldings;
- all doors and false doors, including those at the east and north walls;
- all painted wall and soffit surfaces, except for the landscape painting signed “W. Mensching, Evergreene Studio, 1990” within the niche in the west wall;
- all decorative ceiling features, including painted mirrored panels, metal grilles, painted surfaces, and moldings.

*Balcony portion of Terrace Room*

- all balustrades, including those at the staircase at the eastern end of the balcony;
- all decorative wall features, including marble pilaster, column, and wall bases; moldings, metal grilles, and consoles set into walls; and decorative wood- or plaster-work within the blind window on the south face of the arcade wall, at the eastern end of the balcony;
- all doors and door surrounds, except for those at the west wall;
- all painted features of the doors and walls;
- all ceiling features, including metal ceiling grilles and plaques.

## **TERRACE ROOM CORRIDOR**

Architect: Warren & Wetmore

Style: neo-Renaissance

Alterations: Removal, from the north wall, of six candelabras and their supporting pilasters, and the installation of wallpaper (date unknown); installation of three chandeliers (date unknown); removal of the original wall sconces (date unknown).

The Terrace Room corridor, which has marble floors, is reached from a flight of stairs that connect it with the corridor to the south of the Palm Court. Four pairs of double doors, which are set within ornate surrounds decorated with acanthus-leaf and bead-and-reel moldings, shells, foliate elements, and shields bearing the Plaza insignia, lead from the corridor to the Terrace Room balcony. The south wall of the corridor, like the walls of the Mezzanine Foyer and stairway, is painted to imitate ashlar stone. The north wall, which may originally have had the same treatment as the other corridor walls, and as the walls of the Mezzanine Foyer and stairway linking the Mezzanine Foyer with the Grand Ballroom Foyer and ground floor, has been covered with non-historic wallpaper. Tapestries set within frames, which appear to have been present in the Corridor in undated historic photographs by Ezra Stoller, are attached to the north and south walls. The same photographs show tall floor lamps, wall sconces, and candelabras set on top of pilasters, rather than the extant chandeliers, providing illumination for the Corridor.

### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- the marble floor;
- all ceiling features, including moldings;
- all doors, including the Dutch door on the south wall;
- all wall features, except for the wallpaper on the north wall, and including the painted wall surfaces; door surrounds; the festoon over the Dutch door on the south wall; and pilasters;
- tapestries set within frames, which are attached to the north and south walls.

## **MEZZANINE FOYER**

Architect: Warren & Wetmore

Style: neo-Renaissance

Alterations: Removal of original wall sconces (date unknown); installation of mirrors on the elevator doors and above the elevator doors (date unknown); installation of an elevator button panel, two indicator panels, and signage (date unknown); installation of metal louvers over the large mirror at the east wall (date unknown); installation of a wall with a paneled door, pilastered door surround, and swan's-neck pediment in the former corridor at the western end of the room (date unknown); removal of the original chandelier from northern portion of the room, and of two original hanging light fixtures from the southern portion of the room (date unknown); installation, in the coffered ceiling, of can lights (date unknown); installation, in the ceiling of the Mezzanine Foyer near the stairway, of recessed lighting (date unknown).

Like the Terrace Room Corridor, the Mezzanine Foyer has marble floors. The opening between the two spaces is flanked by pilasters with ornate capitals, which are also present throughout the Foyer. Among the more notable features of the Foyer are its elevators, set within paneled surrounds with a disk motif; the large recessed mirror in the east wall, and the curving marble bench below it; the door surrounds on the east wall; the decorative metal radiator grilles beneath the windows; and the richly decorated coffered ceilings, painted with grotesques. A corridor originally present between the elevators and stairway that connected the Foyer to the women's retiring room and women's coat room was closed off at an unknown date with a wall. In this wall is a paneled door with flanking pilasters, set below a swan's-neck pediment.

### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- the marble floor and marble steps;
- both pairs of elevator doors, the brackets at the top corners of the doors, and the elevator door surrounds;
- all wall features, including marble wall base, painted wall surfaces, plaster work, pilasters, door and mirror surrounds, festoons, and metal sconces;
- all doors;
- all mirrors, except those over the elevator doors;
- the curved marble bench below the large mirror at the east wall;
- the sconces attached to the large mirror at the east wall;
- all ceiling features, except for non-historic can lights, and including all moldings and painted, coffered features;
- window features, including the metal covering on the window frames and sashes;
- the radiator enclosures below the windows, including the marble ledges and metal grilles set within the ledges; and the decorative metal grilles on the faces of the enclosures.

## **STAIRWAY LINKING MEZZANINE FOYER, GRAND BALLROOM FOYER, AND GROUND FLOOR**

Architect: Warren & Wetmore

Style: neo-Renaissance

Alterations: Installation, at the beamed ceiling of the upper portion of the stairway, of metal can lights (date unknown).

Both the lower portion of the stairway (leading from the Mezzanine Foyer to the ground floor) and the upper portion (leading to the Grand Ballroom Foyer) have a balustrade with a marble top rail and base and wood balusters; pedestal-like balusters decorated with grotesques are located at the turns in the staircase. The lower portion of the stairway features historic metal wall sconces; two historic, hanging metal light fixtures; and a groin-vaulted ceiling supported by a free-standing column and wall consoles, and painted with grotesque patterns. Among the significant features of the upper stairway are its historic chandeliers; the painted beamed ceiling decorated with fleurs-de-lis, angels, griffins, and foliate patterns, which ends at the wall that separates the stairway from the Grand Ballroom Foyer; and the marble surfaces of this wall, including the arches and keystones, and coffered soffits of the arches, at the door and window openings.

### Descriptive List of Significant Features

- all stair features, including marble steps and risers, and landing floors;
- all wall features, including marble wall base, painted wall surfaces, consoles set into walls, wall sconces, and, at wall separating upper portion of stairway from Grand Ballroom Foyer, features including marble on wall, of window and door reveals, and of panel beneath windows, and all wood, metal and glass door and window features;
- decorative metal radiator grille at ground floor, and grille surround;
- column at landing in lower portion of stairway, and marble column plinth;
- all ceiling features except for non-historic can lights, and including undersides of staircases, painted groin-vaulted ceiling at lower portion of stairway, and painted beamed ceiling at upper portion of stairway;
- all hanging light fixtures, including two fixtures at lower portion of stairway and chandelier at upper portion of stairway;
- two mirrors attached to west wall at lower portion of stairway, and one mirror attached to west wall above a marble base at upper portion of stairway;
- all balustrade features in upper and lower portions of stairway;
- metal hand rails affixed to walls in upper and lower portions of stairway.



Terrace Room  
View west and southwest



Terrace Room  
Ceiling detail and balcony



Terrace Room  
Corridor and Mezzanine Foyer



Stairways

Ceiling between Mezzanine Foyer and Grand Ballroom Foyer  
Ceiling between ground floor and Mezzanine Foyer



## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this Interior, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Plaza Hotel Interior, ground floor interior consisting of the Fifth Avenue vestibules, Lobby, corridor to the east of the Palm Court, the Palm Court, Terrace Room, corridor to the north of the Palm Court connecting to the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and the Oak Room, foyers to the Edwardian Room from the corridor to the north of the Palm Court and the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby, the Edwardian Room, 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and vestibule, the Oak Room and the Oak Bar, corridor to the east of the Oak Room, corridor to the south of the Palm Court, and the staircases connecting the ground floor to the mezzanine floor; mezzanine floor interior consisting of the Terrace Room Corridor, Mezzanine Foyer, Terrace Room balcony, Terrace Room and fountain, and the staircase connecting the mezzanine floor to the first floor Grand Ballroom Foyer; first floor interior consisting of the Grand Ballroom Foyer, Grand Ballroom Corridor, Grand Ballroom and stage, and Grand Ballroom boxes; and the fixtures and the interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces and floor surfaces, murals, mirrors, chandeliers, all lighting fixtures, attached furnishings, doors, exterior elevator doors and grilles, railings and balustrades, decorative metalwork and attached decorative elements; has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and that the Interior or parts thereof are thirty years old or more, 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, among its important qualities, the Plaza Hotel Interiors are part of one of the world's great hotels since it opened in 1907; that in 1971 *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable called the hotel "New York's most celebrated symbol of cosmopolitan and turn-of-the-century splendor, inside and out;" that the eight major publicly accessible rooms as well as the adjacent corridors, vestibules, stairways, and foyers are largely a result of four different campaigns, Henry Hardenbergh's original design of 1905-07, the 1919-21 renovation and addition by Warren & Wetmore, Schultze & Weaver's ballroom from 1929, and Conrad Hilton's renovation of the building when he acquired it in 1943; that Hardenbergh, Warren & Wetmore and Schultze & Weaver were three significant early twentieth-century American architectural firms which were pre-eminent hotel designers; that the Plaza Hotel is one of Henry Hardenbergh's most famous and critically acclaimed buildings and that Hardenbergh is credited with being the first American architect to systematically approach the design of hotel interiors and set standards for the design of luxury American hotels on the exterior and interior of his buildings and that the Plaza Hotel interiors are rare surviving examples of Hardenbergh's interior designs in New York City and represent his spatially sophisticated planning and mastery of historical revival styles; that the Beaux-Arts style 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and Main Corridor feature strikingly veined and carefully matched stonework in white and Breccia marble; that the German Renaissance Revival style Oak Room features wood paneling with elaborate carvings on the west wall, murals of medieval castles and a coved plaster ceiling; that the Spanish Renaissance Revival style Edwardian Room features paneled wood wainscoting and an elaborate trussed ceiling with carved bosses, stenciled decorations and mirrors; that the neo-

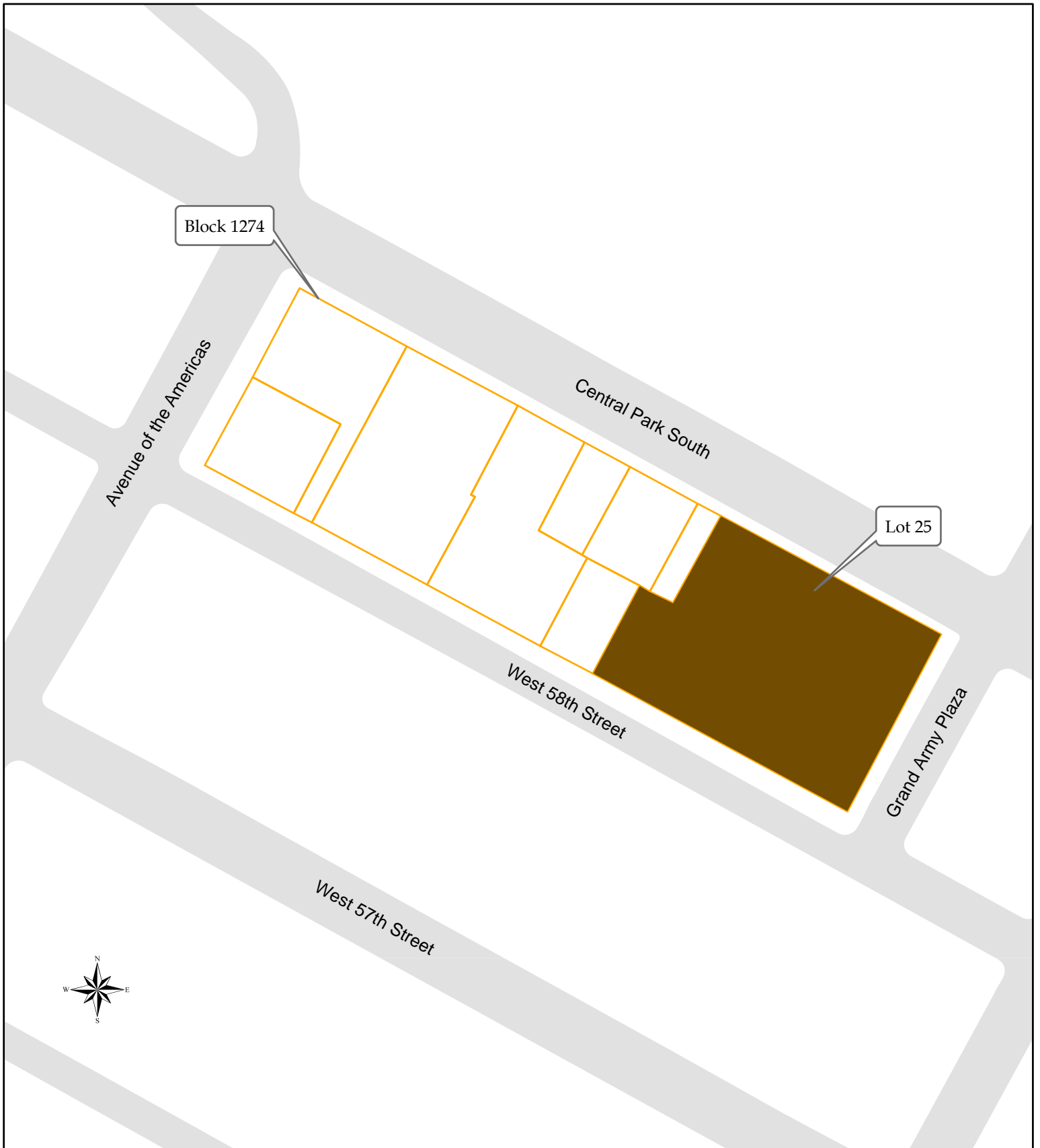
classical style Palm Court features walls faced with Caen stone and accented with a giant order of highly polished marble pilasters, a colonnade of marble columns separating the space from the main corridor and marble caryatids representing the Four Seasons on the west wall; that the 1919-21 addition by Warren & Wetmore includes the neo-Classical style Fifth Avenue Lobby and the neo-Renaissance style Terrace Room; that the firm was known for its hotel interiors which accommodated the expanding social demands of well-to-do Americans by providing vast halls for promenading, lounging and public dining; that the Terrace Room features painted decorations by noted interior decorator John Smeraldi and different levels of space and that its foyer features pilasters with ornate capitals and a richly decorated coffered ceiling; that these spaces are rare extant examples in New York City of Warren & Wetmore's hotel interiors; that Schultze & Weaver's 1929 Grand Ballroom represents the work of one of America's significant hotel designers and its mastery of revival styles and that the neo-Classical style room features attached Ionic columns and an elaborate coved ceiling; that the Plaza Operating Company owned the current building and its predecessor from 1902 to 1943 and that the Plaza was managed by noted hotelier Frederic Sterry from 1905 to 1932; that in 1943 the hotel was acquired by the Atlas Corporation, which was affiliated with famed hotelier Conrad Hilton, who owned the building until 1953 and that Hilton opened the Tudor Revival style Oak Bar and commissioned Everett Shinn to paint three murals specifically for the space in 1945; that from its opening in 1907 the Plaza Hotel's public spaces have been used by its guests as well as the general public including the 1,000s of people who took tea at the Palm Court and habitués, such as George Cohan, of the Oak Room and that the Terrace Room has been used for receptions and press conferences including that of Marilyn Monroe and Laurence Olivier and that the Grand Ballroom has been the site of benefits, weddings and dances, most notably Truman Capote's 1966 Black and White Ball; and that in 1975 the *New York Times* in an editorial calling for the designation of the Plaza's publicly accessible spaces described the interiors as "among the most splendid public spaces in the city."

Accordingly, pursuant to the provision 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 Plaza Hotel Interior, ground floor interior consisting of the Fifth Avenue vestibules, Lobby, corridor to the east of the Palm Court, the Palm Court, Terrace Room, corridor to the north of the Palm Court connecting to the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and the Oak Room, foyers to the Edwardian Room from the corridor to the north of the Palm Court and the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby, the Edwardian Room, 59<sup>th</sup> Street Lobby and vestibule, the Oak Room and the Oak Bar, corridor to the east of the Oak Room, corridor to the south of the Palm Court, and the staircases connecting the ground floor to the mezzanine floor; mezzanine floor interior consisting of the Terrace Room Corridor, Mezzanine Foyer, Terrace Room balcony, Terrace Room and fountain, and the staircase connecting the mezzanine floor to the first floor Grand Ballroom Foyer; first floor interior consisting of the Grand Ballroom Foyer, Grand Ballroom Corridor, Grand Ballroom and stage, and Grand Ballroom boxes; and the fixtures and the interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces and floor surfaces, murals, mirrors, chandeliers, all lighting fixtures, attached furnishings, doors, exterior elevator

doors and grilles, railings and balustrades, decorative metalwork and attached decorative elements; 768 Fifth Avenue and 2 Central Park South, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1274, Lot 25 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Steven Byrns, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Richard Olcott, Jan Pokorny, Elizabeth Ryan, Vicki Match Suna, Commissioners



Plaza Hotel Interior, 768 Fifth Avenue and 2 Central Park South

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1274, Lot 25

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003



Plaza Hotel Interior, 768 Fifth Avenue and 2 Central Park South  
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1274, Lot 25  
Graphic Source: Sanborn, Manhattan Land Book (2004-05), Plate 83