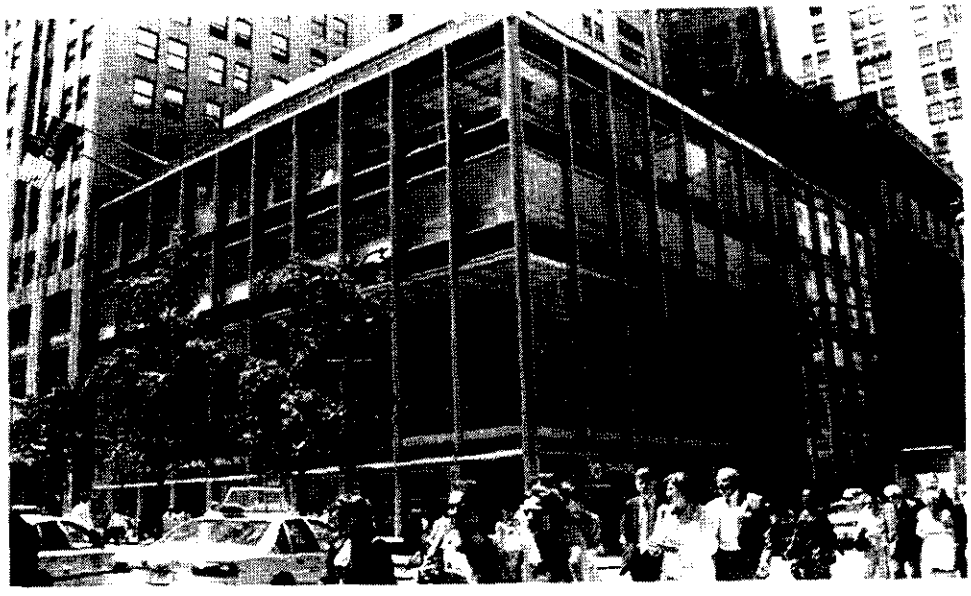
Landmarks Preservation Commission
October 21, 1997; Designation List 285
LP-1968

(FORMER) MANUFACTURERS TRUST COMPANY BUILDING (now Chase Bank Building) 510 Fifth Avenue, aka 508-514 Fifth Avenue and 2 West 43rd Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1953-54; architects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; Gordon Bunshaft, partner in charge and chief designer.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1258, Lot 40.

On September 16, 1997, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Manufacturers Trust Company Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation. A representative of Chase Bank also spoke. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The Commission has received a number of letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation, including a resolution from Manhattan Community Board No. 5.[1]



Summary

The former Manufacturers Trust Company Building, erected in 1953-54 on the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and West 43rd Street, was one of the first buildings in the United States to introduce International Style modernism to bank design. Planned by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, with Gordon Bunshaft serving as chief designer, the building is an important early work by one of the country's leading architectural firms, best known for its pioneering International Style business buildings that provided a potent symbol of corporate America in the post-World War II period. A five-story glass box, featuring clear glass window-walls, thin polished aluminum mullions, and dark gray facings, the monochromatic building is notable for the spare elegance and refinement of its design. The design's transparency and the articulation of the underlying skeletal structure of the building led the *Architectural Forum* to praise it as "the first big building truly to fulfill architects' immaculate drafting board idea of glass as an invisible material." The modernity and openness of the design reflect the concerns of Manufacturers Trust president Horace C. Flanigan who had wanted this prominently sited branch building to present a modern image and an "inviting look" in keeping with contemporary trends in the banking industry that emphasized customer service. The novel aspects of the design elicited extensive press coverage and attracted 15,000 visitors to the bank in its first week of operation. By proving that good modern design was a lure to customers, the Manufacturers Trust Company Building led many other New York City banks to create similar glass-walled banks in the 1950s, and by the 1960s such banks were found throughout the country.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

History of the Site[2]

In the late nineteenth century, Fifth Avenue between 34th Street and 59th Street was the most fashionable residential street in New York. The blockfront on the west side of the avenue between West 42nd and West 43rd Streets was occupied by the Hotel Bristol and the homes of several wealthy businessmen, among them financier Russell Sage who lived at No. 506 in the 1880s and 1890s. West 43rd Street and vicinity contained a number of private clubs and associations: the Columbia Club at No. 4 (Clarence S. Luce, 1890-91); the Century Association[3] at No. 7 (McKim, Mead & White, 1889-90); the Racquet & Tennis Club at No. 27 (Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz, 1891); and the Academy of Medicine at No. 17 (R.H. Robertson, 1889). By 1900, the character of the neighborhood on the blocks north of 42nd Street began to change with the construction of, or the conversion of private residences to, exclusive retail shops, restaurants, and office buildings. The eight-story Hotel Bristol at 500 Fifth Avenue became the Bristol Building in 1902 with offices in its upper stories and stores at street level. A few blocks to the east, the construction of the present Grand Central Terminal and the electrification and submergence of the railroad tracks along Park Avenue in 1903-13 spurred the development of an important hotel and business district. By 1923, so many banks and trust companies had established uptown branches in the Grand Central vicinity and on the blocks of Fifth Avenue north of 42nd Street, that *Rider's New York City* guide reported the area was popularly known as "Little Wall Street."[4] Forty-second Street, which linked this business district to Times Square, became one of the busiest thoroughfares in New York while Fifth Avenue remained the most fashionable shopping street in the city, leading the *Real Estate Record & Guide* to declare the Bristol Building parcel at 500 Fifth Avenue, at the northwest corner of 42nd Street, as "the most valuable building site on Manhattan Island north of Wall Street."[5]

The demolition of the Bristol Building and subsequent construction of the office building at 500 Fifth Avenue had a significant impact on the eventual development of the adjacent Manufacturers Trust Company, because its planning affected the zoning of the entire Fifth Avenue blockfront. In 1922, Gerry Estates, Inc. entered into an agreement with Walter J. Salmon, one of the most successful real estate developers in the midtown business district, to redevelop the site at 500 Fifth Avenue. With other projects in the works, including the adjacent Salmon Tower at 11-27 West 42nd Street, Salmon delayed beginning work on the corner site until the summer of 1929. At that time he announced plans for a fifty-eight-story building with frontages of 100 feet on Fifth Avenue and 208 feet on 42nd Street to be built to the design of Shreve, Lamb & Harmon. The zoning code permitted a taller building on 42nd Street than on Fifth Avenue, so Salmon acquired a long-term lease on the adjacent four-story converted dwelling at 508 Fifth Avenue in 1927; by merging the zoning lots of this twenty-five by 102-foot building and that of 500 Fifth Avenue he was able to build a higher tower than would have otherwise been possible.[6] No. 508 Fifth continued to be subleased to various concerns, including the Gotham Silk Hosiery Company and Huyler's confectionery store. The adjacent eight-story Ziegler Building, at 510-514 Fifth Avenue, constructed c. 1900, housed the tobacconist Alfred Dunhill of London, as well as numerous lawyers, accountants, and insurance brokers in the 1920s and 1930s. Both properties were owned by the Mutual Insurance Company in 1941 when Manufacturers Trust Company -- then occupying a branch at 513 Fifth Avenue -- began negotiations to lease them as a site for a new bank building. Wartime restrictions on building supplies kept the project from going forward immediately, but in October 1944 the two institutions entered into a lease in which Mutual Life agreed to construct a new bank building to the specifications of Manufacturers Trust.[7] A corollary agreement with Walter Salmon permitted Manufacturers Trust Company to sublease (and ultimately redevelop) 508 Fifth Avenue, provided that during the time Salmon's lease remained in effect (1944-65) any building erected on the portion of the lot at No. 508 would not exceed the height of the then-existing building (sixty-three feet) or otherwise interfere with 500 Fifth Avenue. Thus, the height of the new bank building was effectively limited to four or five stories.

Manufacturers Trust Company and Its Fifth Avenue Branch[8]

The Mechanics Bank of Brooklyn, the parent organization of the Manufacturers Trust Company, was organized in 1853 to serve the business

community in Brooklyn's Fourteenth Ward. In 1865, it reorganized as a national bank under the name Manufacturers' National Bank of New York with offices in the Wall Street area. After financial reverses in 1867, the bank moved back to Brooklyn. In 1914 it merged with another Brooklyn institution, the Citizens Trust Company (established 1904), to create the Manufacturers-Citizens Trust Company, which changed its name to the Manufacturers Trust Company in 1915. From the beginning the bank emphasized neighborhood banking services, acquiring numerous branches by purchasing and merging with such institutions as the West Side Bank (1918), the Ridgewood National Bank (1921), the North Side Bank of Brooklyn, the Industrial Savings Bank (1922), the Columbia Bank (1923), the Yorkville Bank, the Gotham Bank, the Fifth National Bank, and the Commonwealth Bank of New York (1927). By 1944 Manufacturers Trust had sixty-seven branches in addition to its main office at 55 Broad Street and was committed to further expansion. Many new services were introduced during the late 1930s and early 1940s, including personal loans, property improvement loans, special checking accounts, construction loans, and industrial credit for manufacturers. The bank's Annual Report for 1944 noted that "the rapid growth of many of our offices, furthered by the various new services we are extending to our customers and by the special services incident to the war effort, will soon call for additional expansion of quarters."[9] The situation was particularly acute in the firm's midtown branch at 513 Fifth Avenue, which was "second only to the Head Office in the amount and importance of its business."[10] According to a document prepared by the bank in 1944, this small branch had begun to approach its limit almost ten years before when it was serving approximately 7,500 customers and since then had added 10,000 new accounts.[11]

In December 1944, the architectural firm of Walker & Gillette filed plans with the Department of Buildings for a four-story building "in what has been called the Federal Classic style of architecture."[12] Construction was delayed due to government restrictions on building materials and rent control provisions which prevented Mutual Life from dispossessing the commercial tenants from the existing buildings on the site.[13] In 1948, the bank announced it had cancelled its plans for the new Fifth Avenue branch, but after considerable negotiation the project was revived in July 1950. Walker & Poor, the successor firm to Walker & Gillette, was retained to revise the plans and in January 1951 the insurance company delivered the Ziegler Building free of tenants to Manufacturers Trust. The day after the last of the office tenants vacated the building, new federal restrictions were imposed on the use of steel and other critical materials in response to the Korean War effort. Faced with the prospect of paying rent on an empty eight-story building, Manufacturers Trust leased the Ziegler Building to several government agencies. Finally, in July 1952, after eight years of delay, the government released the steel needed for the new building. New plans were filed with the Department of Buildings in April 1953.[14] However, the new designs were not by Walker & Poor, which had been dismissed by the bank in 1951 after a dispute over an unusually high bill for professional services, but by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, a firm that had just established a place for itself at the forefront of modernist design with its revolutionary Lever House building.

The International Style and the Manufacturers Trust Company Building[15]

The modernism exemplified by the Manufacturers Trust Building is that of the second wave of the International Style which flourished in this country in the post-World War II period. This style was given its name in 1932 when architect Philip Johnson and historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock organized a momentous exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in which they presented a body of avant-garde modernist architecture that they argued represented a new "International Style" within the modernist movement.[16]

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

Gordon Bunshaft was among this younger generation of architects in America, which also included Eero Saarinen, Wallace K. Harrison, I.M. Pei, and Philip Johnson, who were particularly influenced by European modernism. Mies, himself,

had a successful career in the United States, producing a number of buildings in Chicago which were to have a major impact on American architecture. At the Armour Institute (later the Illinois Institute of Technology, master plan 1939-41, buildings 1942-56) and Lake Shore Drive Apartments (1948-51), Mies sought to reduce his buildings to skeletons of polished metal with glass "skins" which achieve their beauty through a clear articulation of structure and proportional relationships, and refined detailing. Mies's American buildings were especially influential for Gordon Bunshaft in his design for the Manufacturers Trust Building. Among the particularly Miesian elements of Bunshaft's design was the use of thin vertical mullions, projected ten inches from the curtain walls, to create shadows "that provide texture and depth to the glass wall" and emphasize the skeletal construction of the building. Because Manufacturers Trust was partially shielded from direct light by taller, surrounding buildings, Bunshaft used clear rather than tinted glass; this, coupled with the controlled lighting of the interior allowed him to achieve an ideal envisioned by Mies in the early 1920s, the transparent building. (In contrast, the glass at Lever House is tinted blue-green and the mullions are raised only one-and-one quarter inch from the glass, so that the wall reads as a taut, impenetrable skin.) Thus, the *Architectural Forum* considered Manufacturers Trust, "the first big building truly to fulfill architects' immaculate drafting board idea of glass as an invisible material" and concluded that "at last the deeply sculptural feeling of a steel frame under construction has been retained in the completed building."[17] In addition, the *Forum* believed the lack of color in the glass and the monochrome palate of the Manufacturers facade created a greater sense of "severity and dignity than [at] Lever."[18]

Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill[19]

The firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill was established in 1936 in Chicago by Louis Skidmore (1897-1962) and Nathaniel Owings (1903-84). By 1950, in addition to the original headquarters, the firm had established offices in New York City, San Francisco, and Portland, Oregon. Although the offices were managed individually, professional expertise was shared among them, and they followed a common approach to building design and project management. Organized along the model of a large business enterprise with numerous employees trained in a variety of disciplines, the firm was able to offer a complete package of architectural, interior and environmental design, engineering, planning, and project management. Among its major innovations within the field of architecture was the use of a team approach, in which a core group consisting of an administrative partner, a design partner, a project manager, senior designers, and technical personnel remained constant on a project in order to ensure consistency and integrity of design. From its inception, the firm made the ideological commitment to design only in the modern mode and "embraced the belief that architecture could improve the quality of human life."[20]

The New York office of the firm opened in 1937, when Skidmore and Owings were offered a commission for alterations to the New York offices of the American Radiator Company, on the condition that a partner remain in New York to supervise the work. By 1939, the partners decided to keep two non-centralized offices, with Skidmore at the head of the New York branch and Owings in charge of the Chicago office. Specialists were hired in varied disciplines in order to take on larger commissions. One of these specialists was John O. Merrill, an architectural engineer who joined the firm as a limited partner in 1939. Two years earlier, Gordon Bunshaft had been hired as a designer. His imprint was eventually to shape the design image of SOM.

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

burst onto the stuffy, solid masonry wall of Park Avenue like a vision of a new world."[21]

Following Lever House, Bunshaft was involved in the design of a number of outstanding buildings, including the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company headquarters (1957) in Bloomfield, Connecticut; the Pepsi-Cola Building[22] (1958-60) on Park Avenue; the United States Air Force Academy (1959) in Colorado Springs; the Chase Manhattan Bank Headquarters and Plaza (1960-61) and 140 Broadway (1964-67) in lower Manhattan; the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (1963) at Yale University; the W.R. Grace Building (1973) on West 42nd Street; the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (1971) at the University of Texas, Austin; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (1974) in Washington, D.C.; and the National Commercial Bank (1983) in Jedda, Saudi Arabia.

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

The Design of the Manufacturers Trust Building[23]

In an interview with architectural historian Carol Krinsky, Gordon Bunshaft indicated that Manufacturers Trust Company first consulted SOM about plans for a new Fifth Avenue branch in 1953 on the recommendation of Lou Crandall, a member of the Board of Directors at Manufacturers Trust, who headed the Fuller Construction Company which had built Lever House. It should be noted, however, that Manufacturers Trust had already established a relationship with Louis Skidmore (head of the New York branch of SOM) who had been serving on the advisory board of the bank's 57th Street branch since 1950.[24] Skidmore's long-standing friendship with Horace C. ("Hap") Flanigan,[25] who had been elected president and chief executive officer of Manufacturers Trust Company in September 1951, may well have been a factor in securing the commission for SOM. Initially, the bank requested that SOM review Walker & Poor's plans to see if the design could be improved while retaining the structural drawings. According to Krinsky, only an hour after their initial meeting, "Bunshaft called to convince Crandall that it would be unwise to try to save a small amount of money on engineering fees when a better building might result from a fresh start."[26]

In creating a new design for the bank, SOM had to take into account certain programmatic restrictions that were written into the 1953 agreement between the Mutual Life Insurance Company and Manufacturers Trust, amending the lease of 1944. This agreement required Manufacturers to erect a new building that would have "no less than 25,000 and no more than 70,000 square feet of floor space at or above street level," would "occupy the entire legally permissible street frontage on Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street" at street level, and would "be planned as to make available for banking purposes the major portion of the street floor."[27] In contrast to the original agreement of 1944, the entire cost of the building was to be borne by Manufacturers Trust, though Mutual Life agreed to loan the bank $1,000,000 toward demolition and construction. The covenants regarding 508 Fifth Avenue remained in effect, limiting the height of the building on at least one quarter of the site. In addition, Horace Flanigan expressed several major requirements for the design. First, the design had to be adaptable for some other type of business, since as a banker during the Depression he had come to realize how difficult it was to sell or lease a traditional bank building when a branch closed. Second, the building had to be capable of serving a high volume of retail and commercial customers, and have offices and a conference room where the bank president and officers could meet with clients who found it inconvenient to travel downtown. Most of all, the building had to present a modern image and "an inviting look"[28] in keeping with the bank's emphasis on customer service, as epitomized in its advertising slogans "Everybody's Bank Just Around the Corner" and "Come and See Us, You'll Be Very Welcome."[29]

"Sensing the opportunity for a masterpiece,"[30] Louis Skidmore followed a procedure he had initiated for the firm's World's Fair projects, sponsoring an informal, weekend competition among the young designers in the firm to produce conceptual sketches. According to Nathaniel Owings, "they were encouraged to come up with whatever popped into their heads, and the history and tradition of banking be damned."[31] Designer Charles Evans Hughes III placed first with a sketch that contained several elements which were eventually incorporated into the executed bank building. Hughes envisioned a glass-walled building of four stories, with two principal floors given over to customer services and a penthouse story surrounded by a roof garden for the executive offices. A principal feature of the design was a

massive bank vault that could be viewed easily from the street through the bank's clear glass walls. Hughes's design underwent many modifications as the firm's experts in design, materials, and construction developed the project, but his basic concept remained. Responsibility for this prestigious project was given to the firm's senior designer Gordon Bunshaft and to William S. Brown, an expert on modern pre-fabricated materials, who served as project coordinator.[32]

The resulting building is a transparent, luminous clear glass box which architectural critic Louis Mumford likened to a lantern. Occupying the entirety of its 100 by 125-foot site, it has curtain walls of clear glass on both Fifth Avenue and West 43rd Street. Thin, polished aluminum mullions and horizontal rails hold the glass in place (the panes on the second story, measuring 9 feet-8 inches x 22 feet and weighing 1,500 pounds, were the largest ever installed in a building at the time). Dark gray spandrel panels of polished opaque wire-glass conceal the floor slabs. Treated as an uninterrupted expanse of clear glass, the Fifth Avenue facade originally was designed with no entrance or signage, but rather the building's use was to be indicated solely by the gleaming polished steel vault visible through the plate glass window. The entrance to the banking space is on West 43rd Street; it originally was marked only by a discrete aluminum sign with white lettering. A second entrance at the west end of the 43rd Street facade provides access to the elevator corridor at the rear of the building.

Supporting the building are eight interior columns set eleven feet from the Fifth Avenue building line and twenty feet from the West 43rd Street building line. Concrete floor slabs are cantilevered over the relatively short spans from the columns to the clear glass walls. At the second story, the cantilevered floor is pulled back from the exterior wall, so that the main banking areas appear to be contained within one forty-foot-high space. The concrete slabs were deliberately kept thin both to meet the building height limitation and to create an impression of extreme lightness. This aesthetic of lightness is enhanced by the thinness of the external metal skeleton which the construction superintendent for the project described "as more like jewelry than building."[33] At the same time, the illumination produced by thousands of cathode tubes concealed behind thin plastic panels dematerializes the surface of the ceiling, contributing to the sense that the slabs are weightless and floating. This high level of illumination was intended to counteract the natural reflectivity of the clear glass walls. As the *Architectural Forum* noted it is "an old merchandizing trick" to put more illumination inside a store window than outside the clear glass to ensure that the contents can be seen,

> But doing this to a five-story building is new and surprising, a true landmark in the delineation of space. It makes a glass wall into something it has not been before, an invisible control instead of a mysterious barrier.[34]

The International Style as a Corporate Symbol[35]

In addition to its aesthetic appeal, the design of the Manufacturers Trust Company Building also created just the "inviting" impression Horace Flanigan had requested from the architects. The striking difference between this modern clear glass-walled bank and "the ponderous stone piles which banks have traditionally inhabited" was viewed by Manufacturers Trust as being symbolic of the institution's commitment to modern banking service. This was acknowledged by Flanigan in a news release published by Manufacturers in conjunction with the bank's opening in September 1954:

> These walls give the bank a wide-open, inviting look and turn it, day and night, into a giant showcase. . . . The building will be its own best salesman, a merchandising concept new in banking and one that we believe pioneers the way to better customer service.[36]

Gordon Bunshaft conceived of his building in terms of a department store:

> This is a store type of operation, . . . open, departmentalized, efficient. Downstairs on street level we put the special checking division where the main volume of business is handled -- the 10 cents-a-check department where you go in, cash a check, and get out fast. On paydays the traffic is terrific.[37]

The emphasis on new services and customer relations had been central to Manufacturers Trust's growth from the late 1930s. In this the bank was one of leaders of a general trend in the banking industry known as "the rise of department store banking," a term coined by R.W. Goldschmidt, a student of American banking, in 1933 to describe the trend for commercial banks to take on the traditional roles of savings, trust, and investment banks in order to offer their customers an ever expanding variety of services. The increasing role of federal and state regulatory agencies in fixing

rates of interest and terms of loans had also played a part in Manufacturers' expansion of service, since it was through customer service that banks could most effectively compete with one another. It had long been realized that attractive architecture was good advertising for a bank and a lure to customers. In fact, even before World War II certain experts on bank architecture had urged the adoption of features found in the Manufacturers Trust Company Fifth Avenue branch: bright lights, a friendly atmosphere, and "large windows to permit the public to see into the bank."[38] But with a few exceptions (most notably the PSFS Building in Philadelphia), the pre-war designs that incorporated these features remained architecturally traditional.[39] It was the post-war generation of architects, led by SOM, who were to provide an idiom that would convey the modern image desired by the banking industry. As Carol Krinsky writes:

> Some clients chose the ostensible functionalism of modernism because it was practical; others chose it out of a heightened aesthetic sensitivity or the desire to appear progressive. 'We never had to sell modernism to anybody,' said Bunshaft. 'You have to understand the time. It was a unique and marvelous thing, the situation after the war. Lots of young architects, disciples of Mies and Corbusier, had just finished their training and were anxious to do something new. At the same time, the heads of these big corporations needed new facilities and they all wanted something new-looking. I'm sure these corporate presidents all lived in colonial houses in Connecticut, but for their offices they wouldn't consider anything but modern. They all wanted buildings they could be proud of.'[40]

Manufacturers Trust's new Fifth Avenue branch building was an immediate success. The modern style, then so novel for banks, the transparent walls so at odds with traditional bank imagery, and such remarkable features as the 1,000 ton Mosler safe "ten feet from the sidewalk" and "the largest plates of glass ever made in this country" evoked vast press coverage and public response. The *New York Times, New Yorker, Life, Saturday Evening Post,* and *Fortune* were among the publications that covered the opening of the building, which attracted 15,000 visitors. *Buildings, Lighting, Office Management,* and *Management Methods* also covered novel aspects of the building design for their specialized audiences and the *Architectural Forum, Architectural Record,* and *Progressive Architecture* were united in their praise for the design. For the bank, the greatest praise came from the depositors -- nine months after the new branch opened the *Times* reported that the branch's savings accounts had tripled and special checking accounts and commercial accounts had doubled since moving across the street from its old location. Harold Miner, the vice-president in charge of the branch, credited "it all to the sparkling, nearly all-glass building that has caught the eyes of bankers, business men, and architects the world over."[41]

With such strong evidence "that modern banking premises are a strong attraction for new accounts," Manufacturers Trust stepped up its program of modernizing and redecorating its branch offices in the modern style.[42] Within a few years, many New York City banks opened similar glass-walled banks employing International Style design. By the 1960s such banks were found throughout the country.

Description

Five stories high, including a setback penthouse for executive offices and mechanical equipment, the Manufacturers Trust Company Building has frontages of 100 feet on Fifth Avenue and 125 feet on West 43rd Street. Curtain walls of clear glass are employed for both the Fifth Avenue and West 43rd Street facades. The arrangement of the two facades is asymmetrical; at the south end of the Fifth Avenue facade a narrow strip of polished Canadian black granite sheathes the building's side wall, and at the western end of the West 43rd Street facade, the blank wall of the corner fire stair is also sheathed in black granite (inscribed with the names of the architects, "Skidmore Owings & Merrill," and of the builders, "George A. Fuller Company"). Black granite is also employed for the plinth that runs along the base of the building. Above this plinth is a polished aluminum sill that supports the slender polished aluminum mullions and horizontal rails that hold the panes of clear glass in place. Dark gray spandrel panels of polished opaque wire-glass conceal the floor slabs and provide horizontal accents to counter the strong vertical rhythm established by the mullions (these panels survive intact on the West 43rd Street facade; many have been replaced on Fifth Avenue with dark, non-reflective panels). The clear glass window panes are extremely large for the period, those at the double-height second story measuring 9 feet-8 inches x 22 feet.

At the fifth story, the T-shaped penthouse is divided into office and mechanical sections. Located

in the eastern portion of the penthouse, the office suite is faced with clear glass curtain walls and has an overhanging roof which is trimmed with a wide cast-stone and aluminum coping that provides a strong horizontal accent to crown the building. The mechanical section at the west end of the penthouse is faced in gray brick and abuts the eastern side wall of the adjacent building. This penthouse is partially screened from view by an aluminum and translucent glass parapet which is set back from the edge of the fourth-story roofline. As with its design for Lever House, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill provided a special window cleaning gondola that was lowered from the fourth-story roof. Small movable brackets are used to suspend the gondola. A pair of flagpoles projects from the roof at the south end of the Fifth Avenue facade.

At the ground story, the Fifth Avenue facade has no entrance, although the building's use is indicated by the gleaming polished steel vault visible through the clear plate glass windows. On West 43rd Street, at the east end of the facade, the entrance to the banking space occupies the second, third, and fourth bays. The second and fourth bays each contain three glass doors with vertical stainless steel door pulls, while the third bay is filled by a polished granite panel which is fitted with a circular steel night deposit door. An aluminum Chase Bank sign with a white logo spans the three entrance bays. A second entrance at the west end of the 43rd Street facade, providing access to the elevator corridor, also has three glass doors and a non-historic metal band with the numerals "510" applied to a non-historic black panel.

Subsequent History

The Manufacturers Trust Company Building was awarded the Architectural League's Gold Medal for Architecture and the Municipal Art Society's Plaque of Commendation in 1955, and the Fifth Avenue Association's Award for Excellence in 1956.

Today, the building's exterior remains intact except for the changes in signage, alterations to the West 43rd Street entrances, the replacement in kind of several clear glass panels, and the replacement of many of the dark gray glass spandrel panels on the Fifth Avenue facade with dark, non-reflective panels. In the years since the building opened, Manufacturers Trust continued to grow, merging with Hanover Bank in 1961 to create the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company. According to a representative of that bank, the Fifth Avenue branch office remained "from a business perspective . . . one of the most important in the branch system. With balances of more than $160MM, it serves the hub of the midtown market, and -- for decades -- has been a lynch-pin in our Manhattan system."[43] In February 1992, Manufacturers Hanover acquired full ownership of the land beneath the building from Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York.[44] Manufacturers Hanover Trust later merged with Chemical Bank, which subsequently merged with Chase Manhattan Bank, which was renamed Chase Bank in 1996. The building remains in banking use, with the addition of retail use on West 43rd Street.

Report prepared by
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Acknowledgments

The author wishes to acknowledge the contribution of Courty Andrews, whose "Manufacturers Hanover Trust, 510 Fifth Avenue" seminar paper, written at Columbia University in Fall, 1987, was an invaluable resource.

NOTES

1. The Landmarks Preservation Commission had previously held a public hearing on this item (LP-1543) on September 17, 1985 (Item No. 4), which was continued to November 12, 1985 (Item No. 1); December 10, 1985 (Item No. 1); and March 11, 1986 (Item No. 1). The Commission held a subsequent public hearing on this item (LP-1768) on December 12, 1989 (Item No. 32), which was continued to April 3, 1990 (Item No. 23) and July 10, 1990 (Item No. 3).

2. This section is based on material from the following sources: M. Christine Boyer, *Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style, 1850-1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 140; *Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx* (New York: E. Robinson, 1885); *Atlas of the City of New York: Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1899-1909); *Atlas of the City of New York: Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1928-60); *Manhattan Land Book* (New York: G.W. Bromley, 1934); *Manhattan Land Book* (New York: G.W. Bromley, 1955); *Rider's New York City: A Guidebook for Travelers* (New York: Henry Holt,

1923), 265; "58-Story Building Planned for Hotel Bristol Site," *Real Estate Record & Guide*, July 20, 1929, p. 3; Landmarks Preservation Commission [LPC], *New York Central Building/now Helmsley Building Designation Report* (LP-1297), Report prepared by Janet Adams (New York: City of New York, 1987), 1-3; New York Telephone, *Manhattan Address Directory*, 1929, 1944, 1950.

3. This is a designated New York City Landmark.

4. *Rider's*, 265.

5. "58-Story Building," 8.

6. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, New Building Application 594-1929, contains a letter dated June 10, 1929, from Shreve, Lamb & Harmon to the Superintendent of Buildings outlining the terms of this agreement. It should be noted that 500 Fifth Avenue, Inc. was the lessee/developer of record for 500 Fifth Avenue, while the Jefferson Leasing Company was the lessee/developer of record for 508-514 Fifth Avenue, though Walter J. Salmon was both the president and principal investor in both corporations. See "58-Story Building," 8; and the 1927 lease to the Jefferson Leasing Company recorded in New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3625, p. 282.

7. See Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4327, p. 570; Liber 4327, p. 600; Liber 4327, p. 613; Liber 4327, p. 636.

8. This section on the Manufacturers Trust Company is based on Henry R. Stiles, *History of Kings County* (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1884), vol. 1, 622; *The Hundred Year Book* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1942), 48-49; Jaffray Peterson, *Sixty-five Years of Progress and a Record of New York City Banks* (New York: Continental Bank & Trust Co., 1935), 78, 94; Robert M. Fogelson, "A Report on the Historical Significance of 510 Fifth Avenue," July, 1990 [copy in LPC, Manufacturers Trust Company Building Research File]; Manufacturers Trust Company, *Report of the President at the Annual Meeting of Shareholders* (later *Report for the Year...* (1935-55) [hereafter cited as MTC, *Report*].

9. MTC, *Report* (1945), 7.

10. Ibid.

11. Excerpts from this document are quoted in Fogelson, 24-25.

12. MTC, *Report* (1945), 7.

13. On the delays in the Manufacturers Trust project see Fogelson, 21-28; "New Bank Building to Rise on 5th Ave.," *New York Times*, July 2, 1952, p. 43.

14. New York City, Department of Buildings, Docket of Applications, New Building 49-1953.

15. On the International Style see Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (1932, rpt. ed., New York: W.W. Norton, 1966); William H. Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976); Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971).

16. Among the pioneers of this new style were the French-Swiss architect, Le Corbusier, the Germans Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and the Dutch architects, J.J.P. Oud and Gerrit Rietveld. For the most part, their early works executed during the 1920s were private houses, industrial buildings, and low-cost housing projects. Important exceptions were two examples of government patronage in Germany -- Gropius's Bauhaus (1925-26), a large complex structure for the state-sponsored school at Dessau that was to be an

ideological center for modern art and architecture, and Mies's German pavilion at the Barcelona Exposition (1929). Among the other European architects whose work was represented in the exhibition were E.G. Asplund, Erich Mendelsohn, and Alvar Aalto. Of the handful of works by Americans, the most prominent were Richard Neutra's Lovell House in Los Angeles (1927-29), Hood & Fouilhoux's McGraw-Hill Building in New York City (1929-31), and Howe & Lescaze's PSFS Building in Philadelphia (1929-32). Hitchcock and Johnson's exhibition was accompanied by a book that served as an important English-language manifesto for vanguard European modernism. It identified the essential principles which informed the work of International Style architects. First, because in modern skeleton-frame construction the building is completely supported by the columns and floor slabs, the walls are subordinate elements serving only to enclose space; thus, the effect of volume, "or more accurately, of plane surfaces bounding a volume" should supplant the effect of mass as "the prime quality of architecture." (Hitchcock and Johnson, 41.) Second, since modern economics favor the use of standardized parts and since modern construction techniques favor the use of regularly spaced supports to equalize stress, "good modern architecture" should be expressed by "an aesthetic ordering" of structural members and standardized, modular components. However, to avoid monotony, asymmetrical compositions (especially when they differentiate functional differences in the building's program) are preferred. Finally, applied decoration is to be avoided. To demonstrate that walls have no load-bearing function, supporting columns in International Style Buildings are often set back from the outermost edges of the floor slabs and in some cases buildings are raised up on stilts or *pilotis*. Wall surfaces are flat and smooth, broken only by horizontal bands of windows or in some cases replaced entirely by glass. Roofs are flat and often topped by landscaped decks.

17. "Modern Architecture," 104.

18. "Big Banking," 137.

19. This section is based on Susan Strauss, "Skidmore, Owings & Merrill," and Donald Martin Reynolds, "Gordon Bunshaft" in the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, Adolf K. Placzek, ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., Free Press, 1982); Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (Cambridge: MIT, 1988); LPC, *Lever House Designation Report* (LP-1277), prepared by Alex Herrera (New York: City of New York, 1982): and Gordon Bunshaft's obituaries in *Newsday*, Aug. 9, 1990, p. 28; and *New York Times*, Aug. 8, 1990, sec. A, p. 1.

20. Strauss, 78.

21. Bunshaft obit., *New York Times*, sec. D, p. 21.

22. This is a designated New York City Landmark.

23. This section is based on Krinsky, 49-52; Courty Andrews, "Manufacturers Hanover Trust, 510 Fifth Avenue," seminar paper, Columbia University, Fall 1987 [copy in LPC, Manufacturers Trust Company Building Research File]; Nathaniel A. Owings. *The Spaces in Between: An Architect's Journey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 103-104; J. Alexander,"The Bank Has No Secrets," *Saturday Evening Post*, Nov. 30, 1957, 36-37, 105-106; "Big Banking and Modern Architecture Finally Connect," *Architectural Forum* 99 (Sept., 1953), 134-137; "Money Changing in a House of Glass, *Life Magazine*, Oct. 25, 1954, p. 12; "Modern Architecture Breaks Through the Glass Barrier," *Architectural Forum* 101 (Dec. 1954), 105-111; "Invitation to Banking," unidentified clipping from the Skidmore, Owings & Merrill archive.

24. In a telephone interview on June 28, 1993, Carol Krinsky indicated that the information in her book regarding the commission for the Manufacturers Trust Building was based on interviews with Gordon Bunshaft. Skidmore's service on the advisory board of Manufacturers Trust's is documented in MTC, *Report* (1950). On Skidmore's relationship with Flanigan, see Owings, 103; "The Bank Has No Secrets," 105.

25. For Horace Flanigan see the entries in *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago: Marquis-Who's Who, Inc., 1985), vol. 8, p. 137; *World Who's Who In Commerce and Industry*, 13th ed.(Chicago: Marquis-Who's Who, Inc., 1963), 407; his obituary in the *New York Times*, June 19, 1978, sec. D, p. 11; and "Von Elm is Named to Succeed Gibson," *New York Times*, Sept. 19, 1950, p. 45.

26. Krinsky, 49.

27. Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4876, p. 216.

28. "Money Changing," p. 12.

29. "The Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker* (Oct. 2, 1954), 24.

30. Owings, 103.

31. Ibid.

32. It has not been determined if Charles Hughes remained on the design team.

33. Krinsky, 51.

34. "Modern Architecture Breaks Through," 104.

35. The information in this section is drawn from Andrews, 1-6; Krinsky, 49-51; Fogelson, 10-21, 32-38.

36. MTC, Press Release, 1.

37. "Big Banking," 135.

38. Fogelson, 34.

39. For bank design in the pre-war period see Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 171-187.

40. Krinsky, 49-50.

41. "Glass Bank Lures Tourists, Deposits," *New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1955, sec. 3, p. 1.

42. MTC, *Report* (1956), 7-8.

43. Gary Roboff, "510 Fifth Avenue: Landmark Preservation Summary," July 10, 1990 [testimony submitted to the LPC, copy in the Manufacturers Trust Company Building LP-File, LP-1758].

44. See Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Reel 1854 p. 533,

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

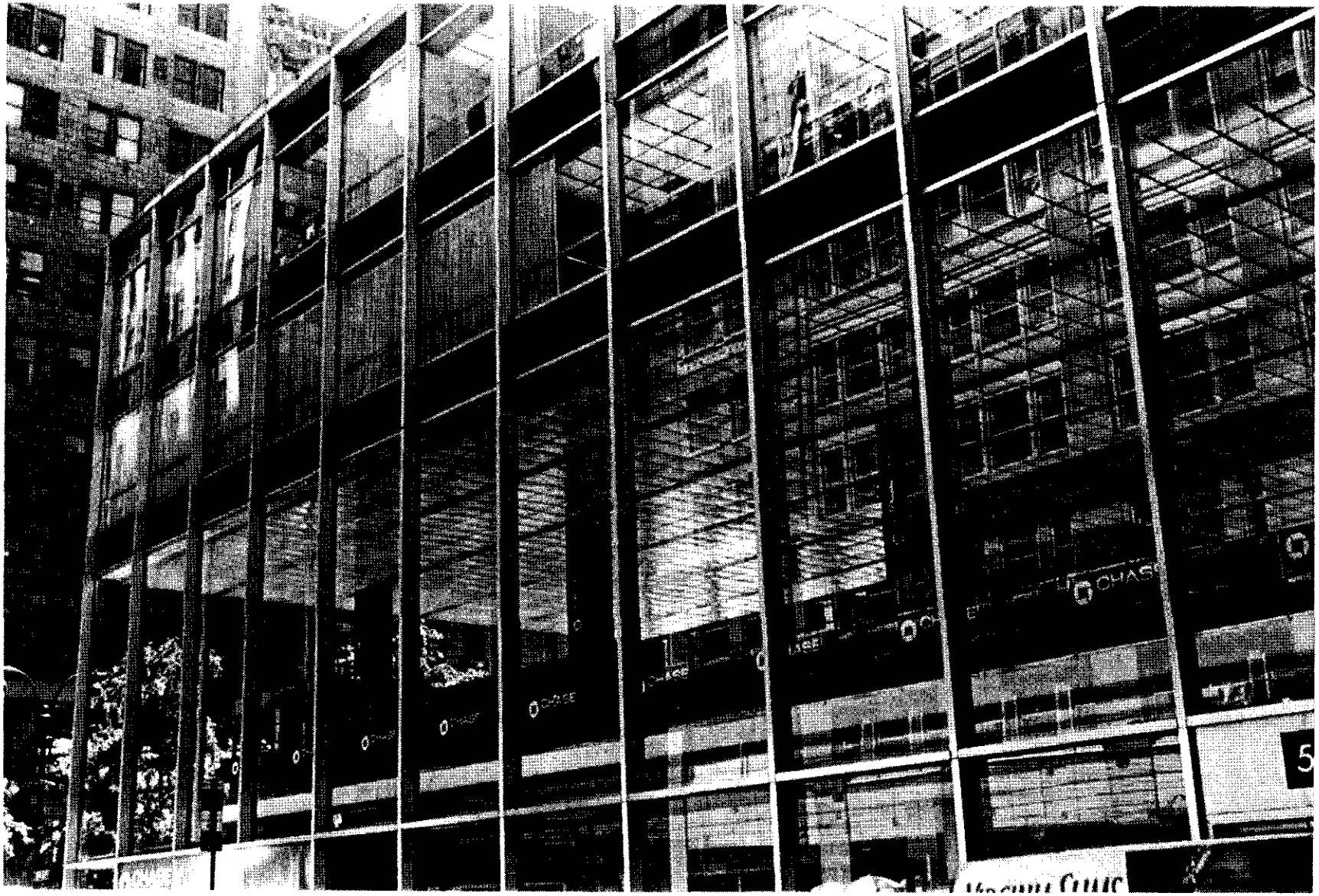
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the (former) Manufacturers Trust Company Building (now Chase Bank Building) has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the (former) Manufacturers Trust Company Building (now Chase Bank Building), erected in 1953-54 on the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and West 43rd Street, was one of the first buildings in the United States to introduce International Style modernism to bank design; that, planned by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, with Gordon Bunshaft serving as chief designer, the building is an important early work by one of the country's leading architectural firms, best known for its pioneering International Style business buildings that provided a potent symbol of corporate America in the post-World War II period; that it was designed as a five-story glass box, featuring clear glass window-walls, thin polished aluminum mullions, and dark gray glass spandrel panels and polished granite facings; that the monochromatic Manufacturers Trust Building is notable for the spare elegance and refinement of its design; that the design's transparency and the articulation of the underlying skeletal structure of the building led the *Architectural Forum* to praise Manufacturers Trust as "the first big building truly to fulfill architects' immaculate drafting board idea of glass as an invisible material"; that the modernity and openness of the design reflect the concerns of Manufacturers Trust president Horace C. Flanigan who had wanted this prominently sited branch building to present a modern image and an "inviting look" in keeping with contemporary trends in the banking industry that emphasized customer service; that, by proving that good modern design was a lure to customers, the Manufacturers Trust Company Building led many other New York City banks to create similar glass-walled banks in the 1950s, and by the 1960s such banks were found throughout the country; and that the Manufacturers Trust Company Building survives today as an important monument in the history of International Style architecture in New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the (former) Manufacturers Trust Company Building (now Chase Bank Building), 510 Fifth Avenue, aka 508-514 Fifth Avenue and 2 West 43rd Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1258, Lot 40, as its Landmark Site.

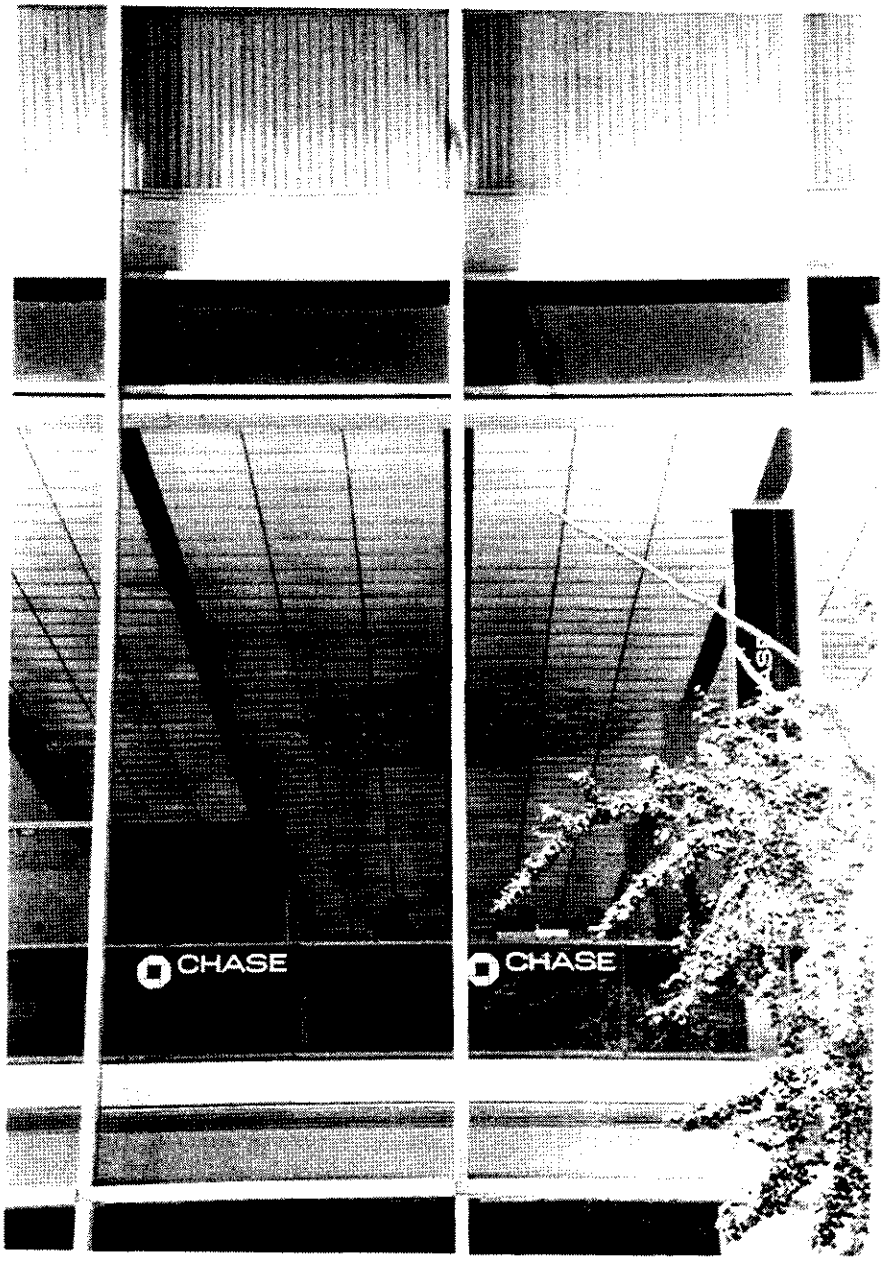
(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company (now Chase Bank) Building, 510 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan
Photo: Carl Forster

(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company (now Chase Bank) Building, 510 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan
View of Fifth Avenue front *Photo: Carl Forster*

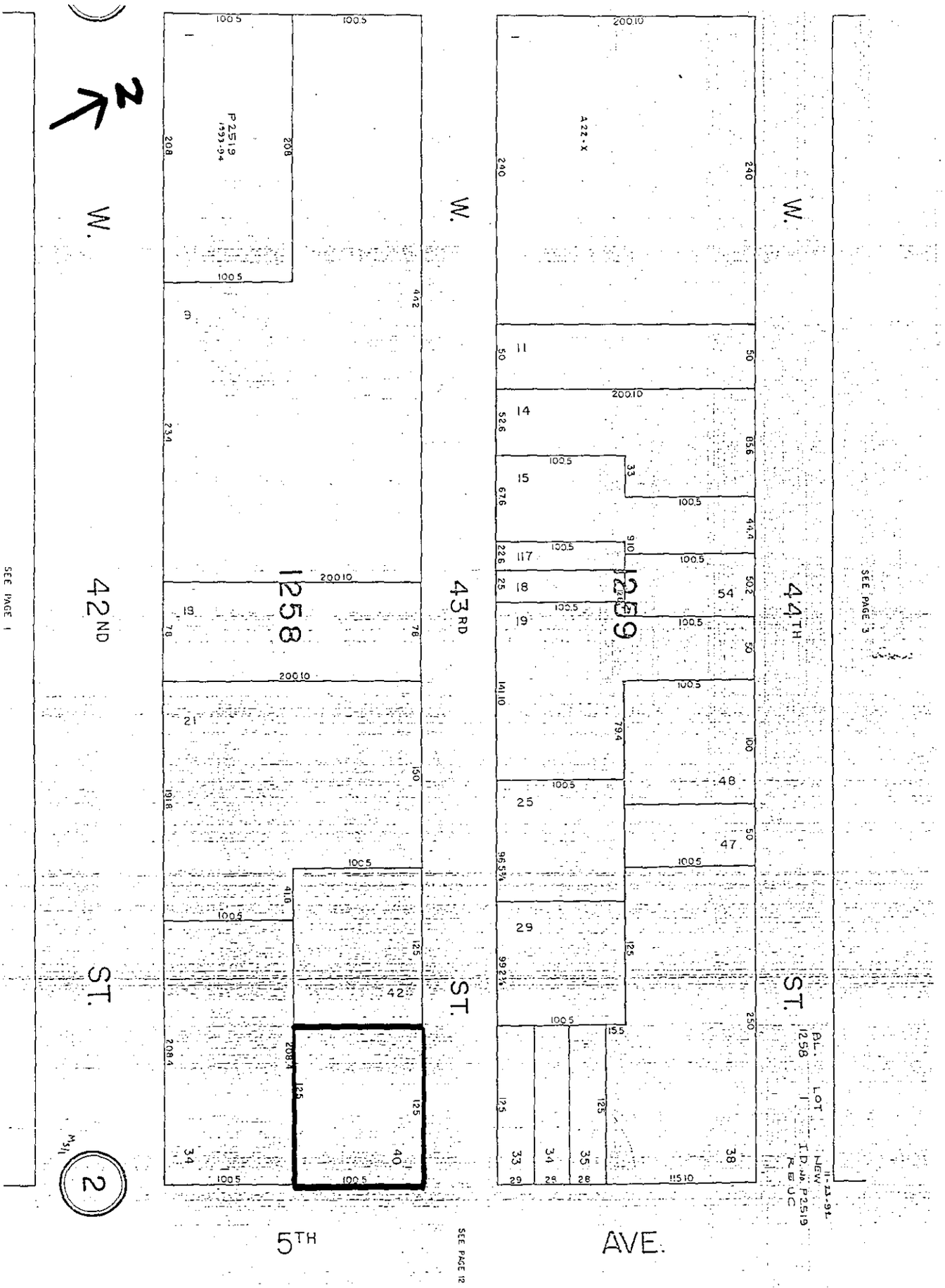


(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company (now Chase Bank) Building, 510 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan
Detail *Photo: Carl Forster*

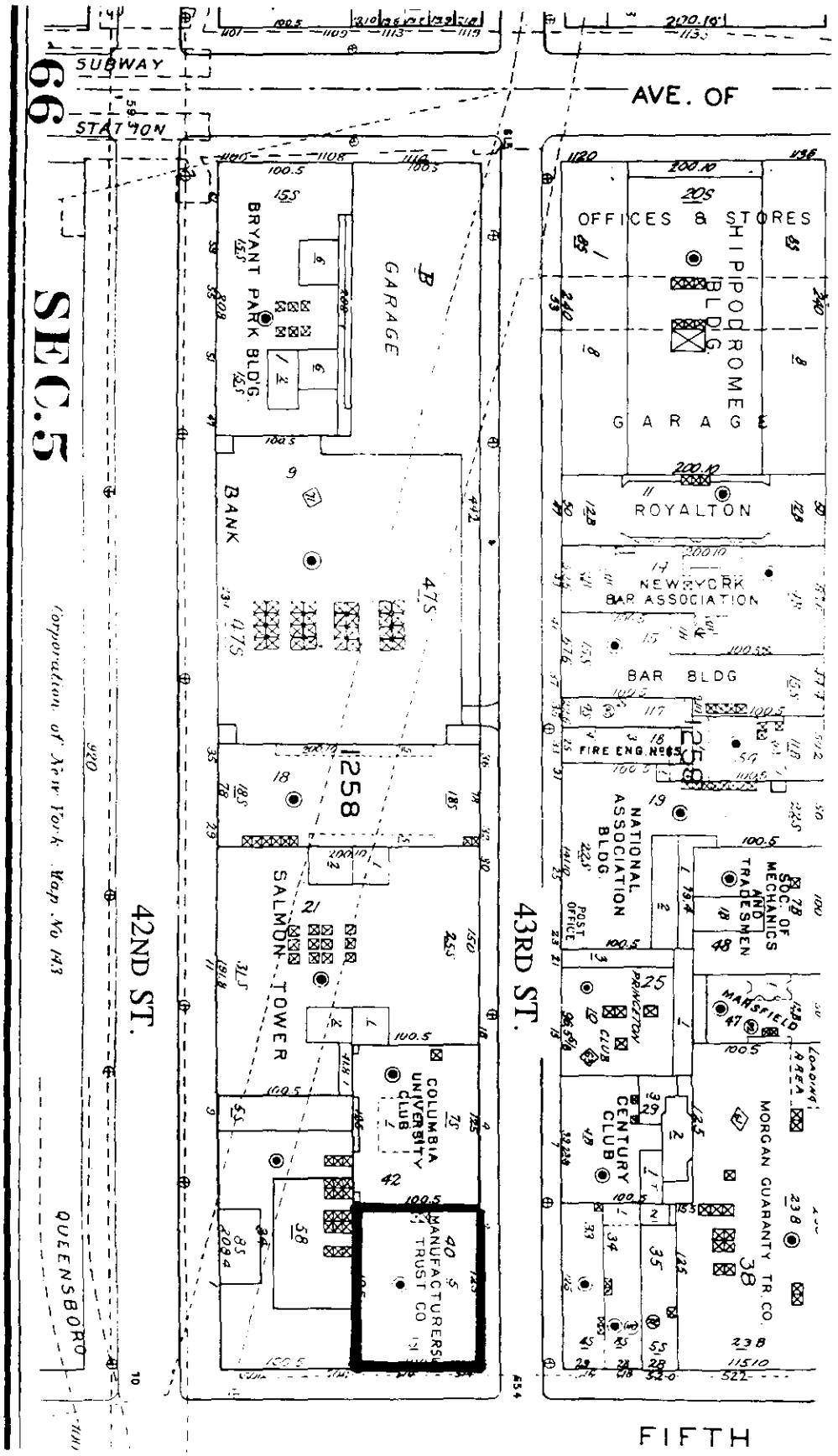
(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company (now Chase Bank) Building, 510 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan
With Mosler safe visible through ground floor window. *Photo: Carl Forster*



(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company (now Chase Bank) Building, 510 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan
Detail of upper windows on Fifth Avenue. *Photo: Carl Forster*



(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company (now Chase Bank) Building, 510 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1258, Lot 40.
Source: New York City Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map.



(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company (now Chase Bank) Building
Source: Sanborn, *Manhattan Land Book* (1996-97), pl. 72