

THE GRAYBAR BUILDING

420 Lexington Avenue (aka 420-30 Lexington Avenue), Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1280, Lot 60

Built: 1925-27

Architect: Sloan & Robertson

Style: Art Deco and Byzantine Revival

Actions: Calendared September 17, 2013

Completed in 1927, the Graybar Building was one of the last structures erected in "Terminal City," an East Midtown development on property above the railroad tracks owned by New York Central Railroad. An integral part of Grand Central Terminal, this 30-story office building incorporates multiple train platforms, as well as a broad public passageway that connects the station with Lexington Avenue.

Originally known as the Eastern Offices Building, the Graybar Building was designed by Sloan & Robertson, an architectural firm that specialized in speculative construction during the 1920s, and later public works. While the powerful stepped massing conforms to the 1916 zoning resolution requiring structures to setback as they rise, the exotic decorative program blends Art Deco and Byzantine-style aesthetics, particularly the monumental stone reliefs that frame the three portals. Viewed in profile, these impressive robed figures clutch symbols of air, water, earth and fire, as well as one of the building's original tenants, the Graybar Electric Company. Founded in 1869, this was the company's corporate headquarters from 1927 to 1982.

Of special interest are the metal rats that enliven the south portal, leading to the Graybar passage, at 43rd Street. These animals appear on the limestone reliefs above the gridded windows and seem to be climbing the metal struts that support the center marquee. The building's architect, John Sloan, claimed they were selected to strike a "maritime note" since New York City is "a great transportation centre and a great seaport."

An immediate success, the Graybar Building was fully leased upon completion, encouraging subsequent commercial development on the terminal's east side and along Lexington Avenue. In addition to Graybar, prominent tenants included the J. Walter Thompson Company, Turner Construction Company, Young Men's Christian Association and Remington Rand, as well as the building's developer and architects. S.L. Green Realty Corporation acquired a long-term operating lease on the building in 1998. At that time, a major restoration of the structure was undertaken, including construction of a new entrance canopy and storefronts.



