

Landmarks Preservation Commission
December 13, 1988; Designation List 212
LP-1542

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS, 80 West 40th Street a/k/a 1054-1056 Avenue of the Americas, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1900-01; architect Charles A. Rich.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 841, Lot 89.

On September 17, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Bryant Park Studios (Item No. 3). The hearing was continued to November 12, 1985 (Item No. 7). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of five witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Bryant Park Studios constructed in 1900-01, is one of the earliest buildings in New York specifically designed to house artists' studios. The building's location across from Bryant Park and its generous windows with northern exposures make it aptly suited for this purpose. Designed by the prominent architect Charles A. Rich, the elegant building displays a complex program of ornamentation in an elaborate French Beaux-Arts style. It was also known as the Beaux Arts Building and was commissioned by portraitist A. A. Anderson, an artist with French training and experience, who sought to address the shortage of appropriate artists' working spaces in the city. Above the retail stores at the street level, prominent design features of the building include: rusticated terra cotta, terra-cotta and brick banding, dramatic, multi-story stone window enframements with pediments or delicate metal-railed balconies highlighting the studio windows which themselves are elegantly proportioned and divided, and prominent cornices. In addition to Anderson who had a triplex apartment-studio at the top of the building, numerous artists of note worked here, including Edward Steichen

History of the Bryant Park Area

The area known today as Bryant Park was well beyond the city limits when it was purchased in 1822 by New York City as a paupers' burial ground. In 1842, the Croton Reservoir was constructed on Fifth Avenue, between 40th and 42nd Streets because the area was so remote. Behind it, in 1853, rose the Crystal Palace, built for an international exhibition of that year. This structure burned to the ground in 1858 and the site became known as Reservoir Square. In 1884, the name was changed to Bryant Park, after the poet William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878).

By this time New York had made considerable progress in its expansion northward and the area around the park was fully developed with mansions on Fifth Avenue and smaller individual houses on the side streets. Sixth Avenue, with its Elevated Railroad was a business center, retail by day and other, more lively trades by night. Storefronts lined the street, often with "French flats" above. When the shopkeepers closed their doors, the saloons, dance halls and bistros of New York's Tenderloin District, notorious for its seamy nightlife, came alive.

The block on which the Bryant Park Studios is located was first lotted and conveyed by Edgar S. Van Winkle in 1839. The lot on which the studio building now stands passed through the hands of several individuals and contained a hotel for at least the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁵ It was purchased on December 8, 1899, by Elizabeth M. Anderson for \$175,000.⁶ In May, 1901 the property was conveyed from Elizabeth to her husband Abraham Archibald Anderson who held title to it until 1934.⁷

A.A. Anderson (1847-1940)⁸

Abraham (Abram) Archibald Anderson was a prominent painter of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Born in New Jersey, Anderson received his early education locally, followed by further studies abroad. In the 1870s he went to Paris where he was a student of Cabanel, Bonnat, Cormon, Godin and Collin. He worked in Paris for many years, exhibiting at numerous Paris Salons; in 1899 his "Morning After the Ball" won the Gold Medal. Anderson specialized in figures and portraits, including among his subjects such notables as Thomas Edison, Elihu Root and John Wanamaker. In the United States, his work was viewed in numerous exhibitions of the National Academy of Design, at the Universal Exposition in New Orleans (for which he won a medal for his "From Riches to Poverty") and at exhibitions of the American Watercolor Society. His triptych, "Neither Do I Condemn" was commissioned for the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. He was a member of the American Watercolor Society and the National Arts Club.

Anderson married Elizabeth Milbank (1850-1921) in 1887.⁹ She was the daughter of Jeremiah Milbank, from whom she inherited a great fortune. The Andersons traveled widely, bringing together a vast art collection from around the world. Elizabeth was also a philanthropist. Among the causes which interested her were Barnard College, where she was a Trustee and Chairman of the Board for many years, and to which she gave land and buildings for the college's expansion; the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, to which she gave money to erect the Milbank Baths on East 38th Street; and the Children's Aid Society which built a Home for Convalescent Children in Chappaqua, New York, with her gifts.

Having experienced life in Paris as a young American student, Anderson was anxious to help others in that lonesome situation, once he himself became an established artist. In 1890 he founded the American Art Association in Paris to provide a place for new arrivals to meet and help each other become acclimated. The facilities of the club provided a library and dining room, and social events were arranged for members. Anderson devoted much of his time to furthering the aims of this group over the seven years he served as its president.

Upon his return to the United States in the late 1890s, Anderson lived in Manhattan briefly, but then moved to Greenwich, Connecticut, complaining that he had trouble finding a studio where he could work. Recognizing the shortage of acceptable artists' working space in New York, and with the financial means at his disposal to continue his concern for the well-being of other artists, Anderson took action. In his autobiography he described what happened:

Thinking other artists returning to America would be in the same situation, I decided to erect a studio building. I bought four lots at the corner of Fortieth Street and Sixth Avenue, the former site of the Hotel Royal that had a short time since been destroyed by fire, and designed, planned, and erected the Beaux Arts Studio there.

My business friends said it was a foolish thing to erect so expensive a studio building in what was then the 'tenderloin district.' But I wanted the best, since it is usually the best or the poorest that pays.¹⁰

Although the building was not located in the heart of the artistic center at 57th Street, it was easily accessible to this area. More importantly, by locating his building just south of Bryant Park, Anderson could be assured that the important northern light would not be blocked by any future tall buildings.

Despite Anderson's comment above concerning his own contributions to the design of the building, the architect Charles A. Rich was hired. An admired designer who worked for a number of New York's wealthier patrons, Rich produced buildings in many styles. He had been trained in Europe and so was sympathetic to many of Anderson's design ideas.

Charles Alonzo Rich (1855-1943)¹¹

Born in Beverly, Massachusetts, Rich studied engineering at Dartmouth College, followed by architectural training in the United States and Europe. Returning to New York, Rich formed a partnership with Hugh Lamb in 1882, which lasted until 1899. Lamb & Rich, one of New York City's prominent late nineteenth century firms, was particularly noted for its commercial and institutional architecture, in the Romanesque Revival, Chateausque, neo-Renaissance, Queen Anne and neo-Gothic Styles. Examples of their work include: Pratt Institute Main Building, Brooklyn (1885-87, a designated New York City Landmark), the Harlem Club and the Harlem Free Library (1889, 1892, in the Mt. Morris Park Historic District), and the Berkeley School (1890, later incorporated into the Mechanics' & Tradesmen's Institute, a designated New York City Landmark). They also designed buildings on the Barnard, Colgate, Dartmouth, Smith, Williams and Amherst College campuses. Active as well in residential design Lamb & Rich were responsible for the Astral Apartments in Brooklyn (1885-85, a designated New York City Landmark), numerous houses on Manhattan's Upper West Side and in Brooklyn, as well as country estates outside of New York such as "Sagamore Hill"(1893) in Oyster Bay, Long Island for Theodore Roosevelt.

Between 1899 and 1903, Rich had his own architectural firm. It was during this brief time when he practiced alone that the Bryant Park Studios was built. In 1903, Rich became senior partner in the firm of Rich, Mathesius, & Koyle, designing commercial and institutional buildings, including the 1907-08 addition to Richard Morris Hunt's Association Residence (a designated New York City Landmark). Rich was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in 1913 and retired from practice in the 1930s.

Description

Located at the southeast corner of 40th Street and Avenue of the Americas in midtown Manhattan, the Bryant Park Studios building is now surrounded by huge modern skyscrapers. Once taller than its neighbors, now its southern and eastern facades abut other buildings and are not visible. The building remains essentially intact although the ground story has been extensively altered to accommodate stores. Executed in pink brick with terracotta and stone details, the building displays a tripartite

organization on both elevations. The two-story base is faced with terra cotta, grooved to simulate rusticated stone. A banded brick and terra-cotta transitional story leads to the main section of the building, which goes from stories four through eight on the 40th Street facade and stories four through ten on the Avenue of the Americas facade. (Some stories are double height to accommodate the studios.) This section displays a variety of window treatments and ornament, including many double-height windows. Stone window enframements, some capped by pediments, others highlighted by balconies, group many of the windows vertically and provide dramatic emphasis to the facades. All of the windows have metal frames; the large studio windows predominately retain their original configurations of narrow lights.¹² The broad expanses of window openings with their delicate subdivisions provide contrast to the masonry sections of the facade. The top of the building is set off by a prominent stone cornice and is two stories in height. A mansard roof, part of a 1923 alteration surmounts the western section of the building.¹³

40th Street Facade

This facade is five bays wide. At the two-story base each of the three center bays contains a double-height archway. Only the central one remains completely visible, however, and functions as the main entrance, fitted with a modern plate glass door. An elaborate cartouche decorates the keystone. The rest of the first story is covered by modern replacement signs and storefronts.¹⁴ At the second story the top sections of all three arches can be seen, with decorative curving patterns of mullions. (The mullions of the easternmost window have been changed to a rectangular pattern.) The two outermost bays at this level contain broad, segmentally-arched windows with metal sash.

A simple stone cornice surmounts the second story at the outermost bays while the center three bays are topped by an elaborate stone balcony on heavy brackets, with a stone railing of swags and foliate designs. The third story has two narrow windows in the central bay. The other windows are broad and square-headed with terra-cotta banding between them. Heavy volutes form the keystones.

Another narrow stone cornice separates this story from those above. The next five stories comprise the main section of the building. Narrow balconies on ornate brackets adorn all but the center bay. The two outermost bays are defined by continuous brick piers. The large windows of this bay are unified by stone enframements, punctuated at the fourth and seventh stories by small balconies with ornate metal railings. At stories four and five, the center bay is subdivided into two narrow windows, while the broader windows on each side are grouped under a two-story,

pedimented stone enframement. The three center bays at the sixth, seventh and eighth stories are slightly recessed. A continuous stone sill joins the windows of the sixth story while those above have separate sills. Brick bands link these windows, which are crowned by terra-cotta splayed lintels and volute keystones.

Marking a transition to the top section of the building, the eighth-story windows are segmentally arched, topped by a strongly projecting cornice on heavy brackets and modillion blocks. This cornice supports a small balcony with a metal railing. In this section, the two outermost bays have brick piers which continue from below and flank the plain, square-headed windows surmounting small doorways. The slightly recessed central section includes two narrow windows in the center bay, separated from two large outside windows by broad pilasters with ornate capitals. Another story, comprised of a bank of windows and recessed even further, tops this central section. Originally, a large angled skylight was placed above this, while elaborate antefixes crowned the areas to each side. The 1923 roof alteration added a mansard with a large inset window at the west and removed the antefixes. More recently the large central skylight has been taken off. Currently, a modern railing caps the building.

Avenue of the Americas Facade

The ground story of this facade was always used for retail purposes but the original configuration has been completely covered by a modern front. The rest of this elevation is intact including the numerous original blind windows. The second story is three bays wide and faced in grooved terra cotta. The outer bays contain large, segmentally-arched windows, while the central bay has three narrow windows, each topped by a large volute. Above a simple cornice, the banded third story has square-headed windows. The larger, outer windows and the three narrow central windows are each topped by splayed lintels and volutes.

The main section of this facade rises from the fourth through the tenth story. At the fourth and fifth stories, the two outside windows are joined by a double-height pedimented stone enframement. The three narrow windows of the central bay are topped by splayed lintels and volutes. The next three stories are identical, with a 1-5-1 arrangement of narrow windows with splayed lintels. The ninth and tenth stories continue the same window arrangement with smaller windows. The windows of the tenth story are plain, flanked by elaborate brackets supporting the cornice above.

The top two stories continue the window rhythm. At the eleventh story the windows have splayed lintels and volutes while those of the twelfth floor are unadorned. Two central windows have been joined in a modern treatment. Above the final cornice

the mansard-roof alteration appears, including a square fenestrated brick section to the south. An original brick chimney is located to the north.

Subsequent Building History

Throughout its history, the Bryant Park Studios Building has been home to many well-known artists, including Edward Steichen, Edward Suydam, Haskell Coffin, John La Gotta, Kurt Seligman, and Fernand Leger. Many lesser known artists made their homes there as well as those employed in other pursuits. Doctors, dentists, photographers and decorators were often listed at this address and a well-known restaurant, the Cafe des Beaux Arts, was a lessee for many years.¹⁵

Anderson conveyed the building to his daughter, Eleanor A. Campbell in 1934, but retained his residence there until his death in April, 1940.¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, Campbell sold the building to a corporation.¹⁷ Several corporate groups have owned the building since then, but the studio use has remained. Today's tenants include several design firms, both interior design and clothing designers, as well as photographers and others in artistic fields. At the present time, one artist still maintains a residence in the building.

Report prepared by
Virginia Kurshan
Research Department

NOTES

1. Nathan Silver, Lost New York (New York, 1967), 142.
2. Maxwell F. Marcuse, This Was New York (New York, 1969), 92.
3. New York Art Guide & Artists' Directory (Boston, 1893), 161.
4. Information about these individual studios is scarce, with brief references found in related articles. See, for example, Elizabeth Anna Semple, "New York Studios of Some New England Artists," New England Magazine, 44 (April, 1911), 195-203. The New York Art Guide & Artists' Directory of 1893 lists the studio addresses of numerous artists which show them distributed all over Manhattan.
5. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Block 841, Lot 89.
6. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 66, P. 176, Dec. 8, 1899.
7. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 74, P. 360, May 3, 1901.
8. Information about Anderson's life was gathered from various sources, including: "Col. A.A. Anderson, Artist, 93, Is Dead," New York Times, April 28, 1940, p.37; A.A Anderson, Experiences and Impressions, The Autobiography of Col. A.A. Anderson (New York, 1933); "A.A. Anderson," The National Academy of Design Exhibition Record, 1861-1900, ed. Marion Naylor (New York, 1973), 11, and "Abraham A. Anderson," Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers, ed. Glenn B. Opitz (Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 1983), 20.
9. "Anderson, Elizabeth Milbank," Dictionary of American Biography, vol.1, eds. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (New York, 1955), 263-264.
10. Anderson, Experiences, 123-24.
11. Information on Charles A. Rich was compiled from: Henry F. Withey and Elsie R. Withey, "Charles A. Rich," Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) (Los Angeles, 1970), 506; "Charles A. Rich, 88, Architect, Is Dead," NYT, Dec. 5, 1943, p.66; and the architects' section of the LPC, West End Collegiate Historic District Designation Report (New York, 1984).

12. On several of the studio windows, sections have been changed to accommodate air conditioners and ducts. On the 40th Street facade, the two narrow windows in the center bay of the fourth and fifth stories have been changed to one-over-one double-hung sash. All of the narrow windows of the Avenue of the Americas facade, except for those in the center bay of the eleventh and twelfth stories, are one-over-one double-hung sash. For further information on windows consult the research files.
13. NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, Plans, Permits, and Dockets, Block 841, Lot 89. Alt. 2900-11.
14. Numerous changes have been made to the ground floor through the years, including removing the entrance marquise (Alt. 1147-23), changes to the storefronts (Alt. 905-41, Alt. 2526-23, Alt. 1990-25), and adding the sidewalk entrance to the subway (New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3952, P.60).
15. Reverse Street Directories of Manhattan, 1929-86.
16. New York County, Office of the Registrar, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 3883, p. 142, April 13, 1934.
17. New York County, Office of the Registrar, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 4096, p. 478, Sept. 20, 1940.

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 Bryant Park Studios has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Bryant Park Studios constructed in 1900-01 was one of the earliest structures in New York City specifically designed for artists' studios; that its location south of Bryant Park and its generous expanse of north-facing windows make this building superbly suited for its intended use; that the building was designed by the prominent architect Charles A. Rich in an elegant French Beaux Arts style; that the building was commissioned by the French-trained artist A.A. Anderson, who sought to address the shortage of appropriate artists' working spaces in the city; that prominent design features of the building include rusticated terra cotta, terra-cotta and brick banding, dramatic, multi-story stone window enframements with pediments or delicate, metal-railed balconies highlighting the studio windows which themselves are elegantly proportioned and divided, and prominent cornices; and that, in addition to the successful Mr. Anderson, this building has been home to numerous well-known artists through the years, including Edward Steichen, Haskell Coffin, Kurt Seligman and Fernand Leger.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534 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 Bryant Park Studios, 80 West 40th Street a/k/a 1054-1056 Avenue of the Americas, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 841, Lot 89, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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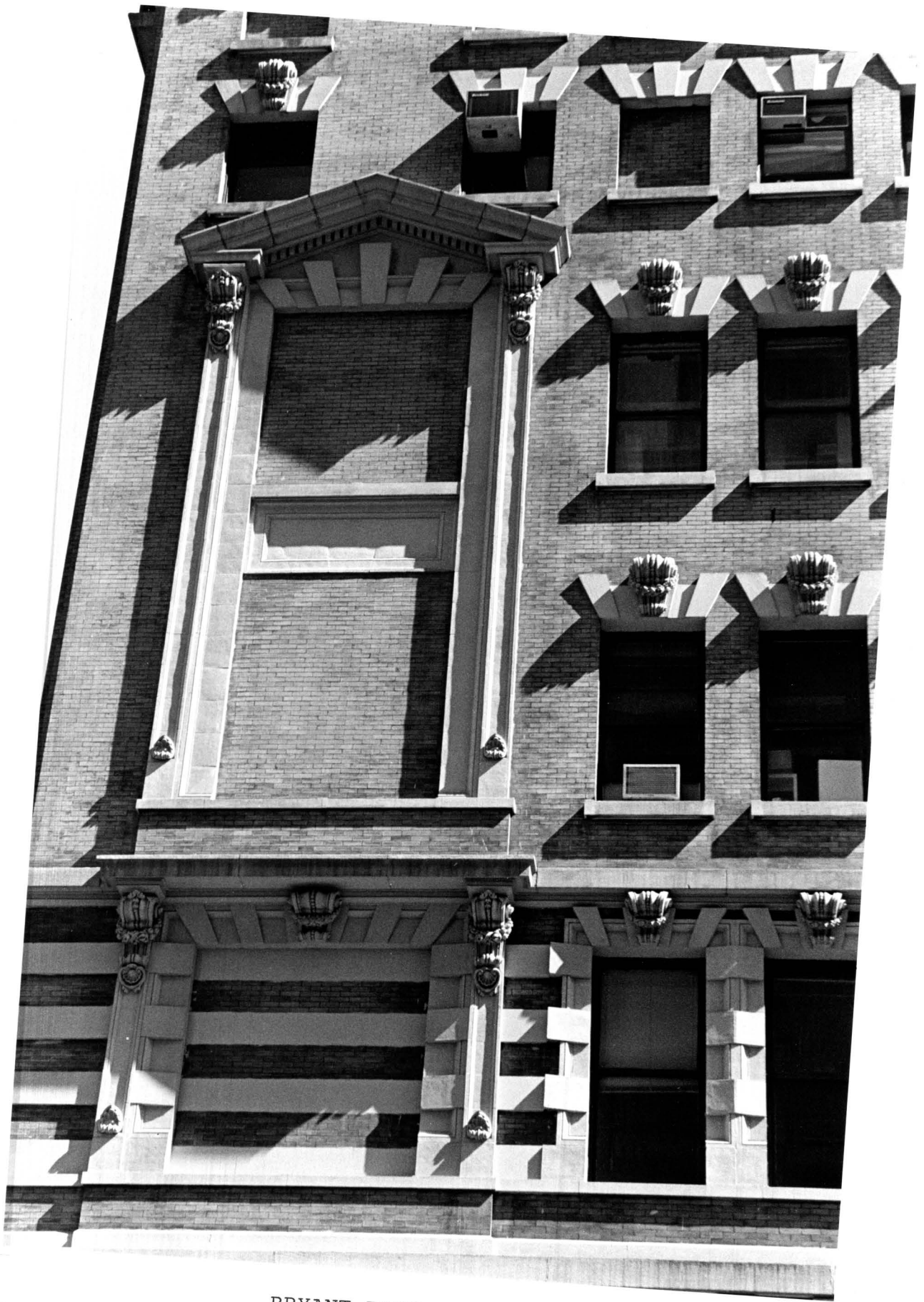


Built: 1900-01

Architect:
C.A. Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS
80 West 40th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Upper Story Detail
Avenue of the Americas Facade

Photo:
Forster, 1988



Built: 1900-01
Architect:
C.A.Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS
80 West 40th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Detail, Avenue of the Americas Facade

Photo:
Forster, 1988



Built:
1900-01
Architect:
C.A. Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS
80 West 40th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Avenue of the Americas Facade
Detail of Lower Stories

Photo:
Forster, 1988



Built:
1900-01
Architect:
C. A. Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS
80 West 40th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Avenue of the Americas Facade

Photo:
Forster, 1988



Built: 1900-01
Architect:
C.A. Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS
80 West 40th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Upper Stories, 40th Street Facade

Photo:
Forster, 1988



Built:
1900-01
Architect:
C. A. Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS
80 West 40th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Detail of 40th Street Facade

Photo:
Forster, 1986



Built:
1900-01
Architect:
C.A. Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS
80 West 40th Street
Borough of Manhattan
Detail of 40th Street Facade

Photo:
Forster, 1988



Built: 1900-01

Architect:
C.A. Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS
80 West 40th Street
Borough Of Manhattan
Detail of Lower Stories
40th Street Facade

Photo:
Forster, 1988



Built:
1900-01
Architect:
Charles A. Rich

BRYANT PARK STUDIO
80 West 40th Street
Borough of Manhattan

Photo:
Forster, 198



A. J. Robinson Company, Builders.

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS.

C. Rich, Architect.

Photo: Architects' & Builders' Magazine
Vol. 3, June, 1902, p.318

BRYANT PARK STUDIOS: Landmark Site
Sanborn Manhattan Land Book, 1986-87
Plate 66

