March, 1979

SURVEY RECORDS New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

305 Broadway New York

**DEPOSITORY FOR** 

CITY, TOWN

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

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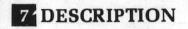
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\_\_EXCELLENT

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Towering above the surrounding tenements and commercial structures, the old McGraw-Hill Building is among the most impressive structures on the New York skyline. Rising over thirty-three stories on West 41st and 42nd Streets between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, the structure commands the attention of all passersby. The most notable feature of the building is the polychromatic streamlined ground floor on West 42nd Street. Here, two large glass-enclosed commercial spaces, originally the McGraw-Hill Bookstore and a bank, flank a recessed, five door wide, centrally placed entryway. Curving bands of enameled steel connect the storefronts to the entrance. This banding is composed of alternating green and blue stripes separated by narrow, raised chrome bars. In addition, wide, raised, bronze bars have been placed within each blue field, adding a sense of three-dimensional texture to the design. The entire ground floor rests on a base of black stone and is topped by an enameled blue frieze ornamented with raised chrome bands that originally supported large bronze letters spelling out the building's name and address.

The unornamented main mass of the building rises directly from the ornate ground floor. With the exception of variations in width due to the setbacks above the tenth and fifteenth floors and above the sixth floor on the West 41st Street facade, all mandated by the New York City zoning regulations, each level between floors two and thirty-one is identical. The facades are composed of wide bands of windows that alternate with areas of blue-green terra-cotta. The double-hung windows are set in groups of four, each group separated by a vertical metal spandrel that was painted a dark shade so that it would seem to disappear. Each sash is separated into three or four panes by horizontal mullions that give further emphasis to the building's dominant horizontal form. The terra-cotta areas, each six courses high, are particularly notable for their shading-the blue-green being darker near the street and getting progressively lighter as the building rises, so that it eventually blends with the color of the sky.

A setback above the thirty-first floor marks the original location of the McGraw-Hill corporate offices. The smooth horizontal line of the building is broken at the thirty-second and thirty-third floors by the presence of a two-story, ten-bay wide projection. These two floors are set apart from the rest of the building by the introduction of a decidedly vertical emphasis. This verticality is accented by paired, 1 x 1 windows surmounted by metal panels and flanked by projecting piers. By setting this section apart from the rest of the building, architect Raymond Hood symbolized the importance of the corporate hierarchy and also provided a transition between the main mass of the building and the ornate horizontal crown. The most notable features of the crowning element, which incorporates much of the building's service equipment, are the projecting horizontal terraces and bandcourses that give

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### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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the building its eccentric, modernistic silhouette. In the center of this crown are large letters that advertise "McGraw-Hill," Originally painted white and set off on a blue-green background, this sign is surmounted by a typical Art Deco zigzag pattern. Before the letters were painted over, after McGraw-Hill's departure from the building, this sign was among the most prominent landmarks of New York City's skyline.

The interior lobby of the building is quite simple in its detail and gains its effect from the careful use of color. The banding that flanks the entrances is continued into the outer lobby and serves to move the visitor from the entrance to the main portion of the lobby. The central lobby is faced with solid green enameled steel panels. In this area are located the interior entrances to the original bookstore to the left, and the bank to the right, as well as the building's directory and a clock.

The only horizontal details in this area are a pair of ventilators shielded by chrome bars. The dynamic polychromatic bands of the exterior reappear once one has passed the directory and lead directly to a stairway and cigar store and then to two banks of elevators. The elevator lobbies have the passive solid green walls, as did the elevator cabs (resurfaced), since these are areas for waiting. The elevator doors are of silver-colored metal ornamented with full-length, concave bronze stripes. Above each elevator are floormarkers with silver-colored numbers and a bronze pointer. The only other decorative forms in the lobby are small projecting signboxes marking the commercial spaces and elevators, and silver lettering that reads "FIRE PUMP."

The upper floors of the building, below the corporate offices, were designed as strictly utilitarian spaces. The elevator banks are located in the center of each floor and unornamented open space radiates from this central core. The only decorative details in this section of the building's interior are small floornumber markers set into the original stone flooring in front of each elevator door.

The most surprising element of the McGraw-Hill Building's interior design is the conservative decorative scheme of the corporate offices. While the exterior and public spaces of the building make a progressive, modernistic architectural statement, the corporate offices are styled in a traditional Georgian fashion,

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complete with fielded paneling, crossetted enframements, and oval rooms. One can only imagine that this colonial revival detailing was chosen because the corporate officers felt most secure with traditional decorative forms that embodied conservative stability and a continuity of traditional values. The detailing of these corporate office floors was executed in a sophisticated manner and is quite impressive. Most notable is the large central lobby on the thirty-second floor with its zodiac chandelier and its murals painted by Ezra Winters,

Although the care of the building has been neglected in recent years, it remains in very fine condition. The major losses are the removal of the bronze entrance signs, the painting out of the McGraw-Hill sign on the crown, and the replacement of the original elevator cabs. Much of the exterior coloring is in need of restoration. The green on the exterior ground-floor bands has eroded away, but the original green color remains intact on the interior. Dirt on the facade has dimmed the effect of the shaded terra-cotta, the paint has begun to peel on the metal spandrel panels, and the apple-green and vermillion that once colored the window frames has been lost (see No. 8). These, however, are merely cosmetic problems, and the building remains one of New York's finest and most important skyscrapers.

#### **PERIOD** AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW \_\_PREHISTORIC \_\_ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC \_COMMUNITY PLANNING \_\_LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE \_\_RELIGION \_\_1400-1499 \_ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC \_CONSERVATION \_LAW \_SCIENCE \_\_1500-1599 \_\_AGRICULTURE ECONOMICS \_\_LITERATURE \_SCULPTURE

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SPECIFIC DATES 1930-31

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Raymond Hood

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#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The most important architectural development of the 20th century is the curtain-walled skyscraper, So important is the skyscraper to our time that it has become the symbol of urban life in America. Among the most significant buildings in the history of skyscraper construction is the McGraw-Hill Building, designed in 1930 by architect Raymond Hood, Prior to the design and construction of the McGraw-Hill Building, skyscrapers had been massed in a vertical manner reflective of their upward thrust, The McGraw-Hill Building is constructed of continuous bands of windows alternating with narrow bands of masonry, making it the first horizontally-massed skyscraper. Designed with a minimal number of setbacks, the building gives the effect of a slab and, as such, is the first expression of the curtain wall in a high-rise building, Hill Building is the forerunner of the horizontally massed, curtain-walled office towers built in American cities beginning in the 1950s, Although the main mass of the building is unornamented, there is Art Deco detailing on the ground floor, lobby, and crown. This melding of conservative and revolutionary forms makes the McGraw-Hill Building the pivotal structure in the evolution of the skyscraper, from the ornamental buildings of the 1920s and 1930s to the unornamented towers of the mid-20th century. In addition, Hood's design is a radical departure from earlier skyscrapers in its use of materials and color, and it is an early example of a multiple-use skyscraper,

The McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, now one of the largest publishers in the world, was formed in April 1917, as a result of a merger between the McGraw and Hill Publishing companies. Involved primarily in the publication of technical journals, the McGraw-Hill Company was located in the old Hill Building on Tenth Avenue and West 36th Street. By the late 1920s, however, the firm had outgrown this site and new space was sought for both office and printing needs. In June 1930, the company purchased from John A. Larkin a large midblock site, measuring approximately 47,500 feet, on West 41st and 42nd Streets, between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Four tenements and a factory were already on the site, but their demolition had been planned as early as 1926 when Larkin "provoked widespread comment by filing plans for the tallest of New York's buildings." Plans for this 110-story building were eventually abandoned and the land sold to McGraw-Hill. This site, far from the corporate headquarters and office skyscrapers of midtown Manhattan located east of Sixth Avenue, was chosen by McGraw-Hill because the cost was low and because

(see continuation sheets 1-4)

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## UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

### NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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the company required a site zoned for both office and industrial uses (printing, binding, and shipping were to be combined in the new building with corporate and clerical offices).

The McGraw-Hill Company offered the design contract for its new multi-use tower to Raymond Hood (1881-1934), one of America's most prominent architects, then at the height of his short career. Born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, Hood studied architecture at MIT and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, as well as with such notable architects as Ralph Adams Cram and Henry Hornbostel. Hood's first important building was the Tribune Tower in Chicago, designed in 1924 in collaboration with John Mead Howells. This influential Gothic skyscraper was followed by the Gothic style American Radiator Building (1924) in New York, in which Hood first experimented with the use of nontraditional coloring (black and gold); the Art Deco style apartment building at 3 East 84th Street (1928), the first building to use the recessed metal spandrels that were to become typical of Art Deco design; the Art Deco style Beaux Arts Apartments (1930); the vertically massed Daily News Building (1929-30); the McGraw-Hill Building (1930); and Rockefeller Center (1931-35).

According to Hood, "economy and good working conditions were the three factors uppermost in mind when we first started plans for the McGraw-Hill Building."2 These aims are clearly expressed in the building's most radical feature--its horizontal bands of windows, These seemingly continuous ribbon windows are actually groupings of four double-hung windows separated by vertical spandrel panels painted a deep blue-green (almost black) color, so that they would seem to disappear, giving the illusion of a continuous opening. Hood placed the windows--more than 4000 of them--as close to the ceiling of each floor as the New York City building regulations would permit to provide the maximum amount of natural light and ventilation. This dependence on natural light was particularly successful above the second setback at the fifteenth floor. These narrow upper floors were planned for office use and have windows on all four facades so that the interior spaces are flooded with daylight. This use of horizontal windows as a frank utilitarian expression of the building's needs and function was influenced by earlier 20th-century industrial design, and was especially appropriate to a building that combined industrial and office uses.

The revolutionary nature of the McGraw-Hill Building's facade was recognized as early as 1932 when it was one of only four American buildings illustrated in Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's pioneering work, The International

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<u>Style</u>. It was noted that the "lightness, simplicity and lack of applied verticalism mark this skyscraper as an advance over other New York skyscrapers and bring it within the limits of the international style."<sup>3</sup>

The setbacks above the sixth, tenth, and fifteenth floors of the McGraw-Hill Building link it to the earlier tradition of skyscraper design. These setbacks were required by the zoning laws, but Hood manipulated them in an unusual manner. Instead of massing the setbacks in a more typically erratic, cascading manner, the massing is strongly horizontal so as to be invisible from the north or south. This gave the building the illusion of being a simple slab. Hood also organized the functions of the building around the necessary setbacks, placing the industrial uses (which needed less light and greater structural support) on the lower levels, and offices on the upper stories.

The horizontal masonry bands of the McGraw-Hill Building are faced with terra-cotta and represent the largest recorded application of machine-made terra-cotta, Hood noted that he chose terra-cotta rather than the more traditional brick or stone because terra-cotta would not become "dingy and nondescript," In 1931, it was noted that the McGraw-Hill Building was the largest structure ever built with color as an integral part of the architectural scheme, 6 Hood had earlier experimented with the use of color for skyscrapers, notably on the American Radiator and Daily News buildings. At McGraw-Hill, he succeeded in unifying all of the elements of a modern building by using a carefully planned color scheme. The terra-cotta work of the building is a blue-green color, called "Dutch blue" by Hood, Hood noted in a discussion of the building that he had experimented with many different color schemes including yellow, orange, and Chinese red. The final blue-green coloring was chosen for its atmospheric quality. The blue shading is not constant throughout the structure, "the blue gradually shading off to a lighter tone the higher the building goes, till it finally blends off into the azure blue of the sky. The final effect is a shimmery satin finish, some what on the order of the body of an automobile."8 This use of shaded facade material was a favorite conceit of architects working in the Art Deco style, and had the effect of making a building seem taller. Other notable examples of the use of this device can be found on the Master Apartments (Helmle, Corbett & Harrison, 1928) on Riverside Drive and West 103rd Street, and on the apartment building at 55 Central Park West at West 66th Street (Schwartz & Gross, 1930). Unfortunately, dirt has virtually obliterated the effect of this shading on both the McGraw-Hill and Master buildings,

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In addition to the blue-green of the main mass of the building and the dark green-blue/black vertical window piers already mentioned, other facade colors included an apple-green shade for the metal windows, and narrow bands of vermillion located on the top jambs of the windows and across the face of the metal covering piers, 9 The "McGraw-Hill" sign that crowns the building and hides the water tanks, elevators, and ventilating machinery originally had white terra-cotta letters with orange stripes. These letters were set against a wall of blue-green terra-cotta, but were unfortunately painted over when the McGraw-Hill Company sold the building. The most striking chromatic feature of the building is the banded ground floor, particularly the central entryway, located between two large commercial spaces, This imposing, streamlined entry is composed of alternating blue and green enameled steel bands interrupted by raised bars of bronze and chrome-nickel steel. Two rows of stylized, Art Deco, bronze letters reading "McGRAW-HILL" and "330 W 42ND ST" were once located above the entrance. The exterior banding is continued into the entrance vestibule, where it blends with the green enamel of the main lobby. All of this enameled steel was originally simonized to be "in harmony with the high satiny finish of the exterior."10

The McGraw-Hill Building was a controversial new structure. Hitchcock and Johnson saw most of the building as a great architectural advance (they did not approve, however, of the Art Deco ground floor and crown), but the architecture critic of The New Yorker wrote in 1931 that the building is "merely a series of superimposed floors, but the fact remains that a tall building, considered as a mass, goes up, not sidewise." This critic also found the color to be "rather dispiriting," and the mass "heavy and unbeautiful." More recent critics, far more comfortable with modern office blocks, have been far more favorable. Paul Goldberger of the New York Times has written that "by common agreement among architectural scholars /the McGraw-Hill Building is/ one of the most influential skyscrapers of New York."

1. New York Times, May 30, 1934, p. 15,

2. "Comfort, Daylight & Air Architect's Aim," McGraw-Hill News, Vol. 5, August, 1931, p.4.

3. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, The International Style, p.156.

4. Letter from J. Andre Fouilhoux to Borden R. Putnam, June 3, 1931; in McGraw-Hill Corporate Archives.

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5. "Comfort...,"p. 4.

6. "Family Awaits Move Order," McGraw-Hill News, Vol. 5, August, 1931, p.1.

7. "Comfort...," p.4.

8. Ibid.

9. Walter H. Kilham, Jr., Raymond Hood, Architect, p.14.

10. "Comfort...," p.4.

11. "The Skyline on the Horizontal," The New Yorker, pp.38-39.

12. New York Times, November 3, 1973, p.31.

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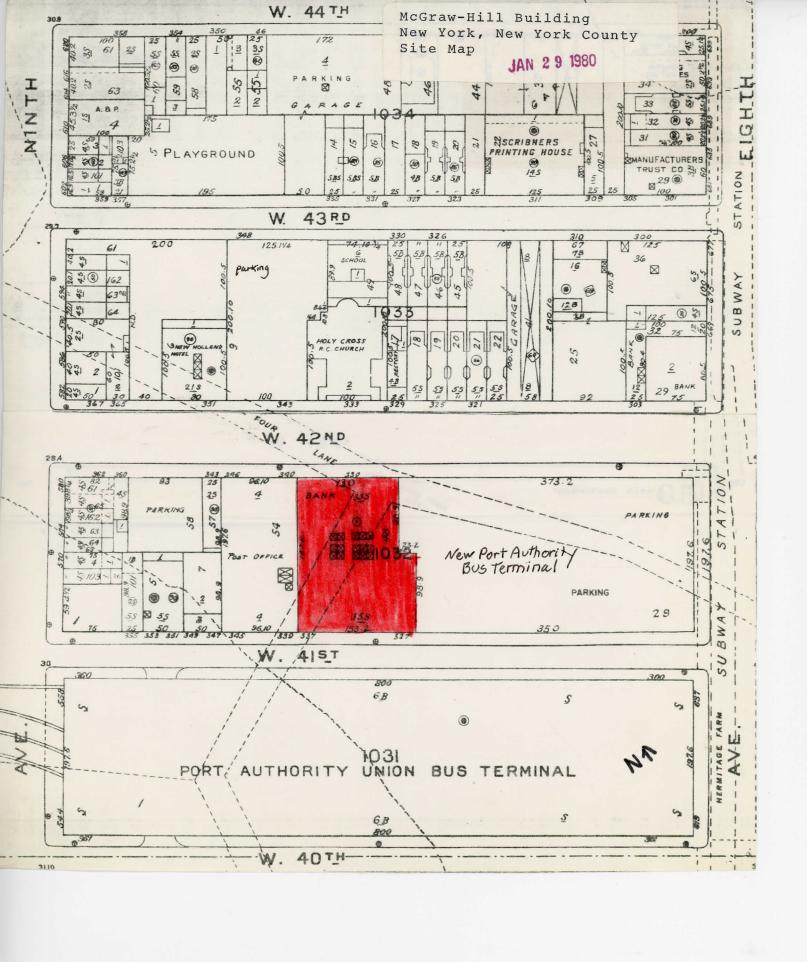
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"The Sky Line on the Horizontal--Brick for Marble," The New Yorker, Vol.7 July 25, 1931, pp. 38-39.

"Tale of Two Towers," Architecture Plus, Vol. 1, October, 1973, pp. 42-53.



McGraw-Hill Building New York, N.Y. Site map

MAR 28 1980

80002701 ew York Working Number 1-29-80 375 CONTROL Photos \_\_\_\_ Maps HISTORIAN This 33 story International style building was built ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN in 1930-31 following the design of Raymond Hook, an important but Short-lived architect of the larey roth century. The building is notably transitional combining adorque geometric art-Decotorin with the severe lines of the International Style. Additionally, the building exhibits an unional use of color in its ferra-cotta surfaces. Accept. P. Reed 3/21/80 ARCHEOLOGIST OTHER HAER Inventory \_\_\_\_ Review REVIEW UNIT CHIEF **BRANCH CH** KEEPER Entered MAR 28 1980 Send-back \_\_\_\_\_ National Register Write-up Federal Register Entry Re-submit \_



McGraw-Hill Building 326W. 42 Nd St.

New York, N.Y. New York County
Andrew S. Dolkart June, 1979

New York Landmarks Conservancy

17 Battery Place New York, N.Y.

View across West 42nd Street, looking south

Photo No. 1 44

MAR 28 1980 JAN 29 1980



McGraw-Hill Building 3260 42 Nd St.

New York, N.Y. New York County

Andrew S. Dolkart June, 1979

New York Landmarks Conservancy

17 Battery Place New York, N.Y.

Lobby looking south towards elevators

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McGraw-Hill Building
New York, N.Y. New York County
Andrew S. Dolkart June, 1979
New York Landmarks Conservancy
17 Battery Place New York, N.Y.
Entrance, looking south
Photo No. 3 of 4

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New York, N.Y. New York County Andrew S. Dolkart June, 1979 New York Landmarks Conservancy 17 Battery Place New York, N.Y. Corporate office, 32nd floor Photo No.4 74

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Photo by Andrew S. Dolkart 6/79

### ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE

NEW YORK

Date Entered

MAR 28 1980

Name

Location

Elliott, Dr. Samuel MacKenzie, House

Staten Island Richmond County

Former Police Headquarters Building

New York

New York County

Eldridge Street Synagogue

New York

New York County

Roosevelt, Sara Delano, Memorial House

New York

New York County

Harvard Club of New York City

New York

New York County

Church of the Immaculate Conception and

New York

Clergy House

New York County

McGraw-Hill Building

New York

New York County

Reed Memorial Library

Carmel

Putnam County

DeRham Farm

Garrison vicinity

Putnam County

Also Notified

### ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE NEW YORK

Date Entered

MAR 28 1980

Name

Location

Gardner, Silas, House

Gardnertown Orange County

Yelverton Inn and Store

Chester Orange County

## Honorable Daniel P. Moynihan

Also Notified

Honorable Jacob K. Javits Honorable John M. Murphy Honorable Sedgwick W. Green Honorable Ted Weiss Honorable Hamilton Fish, Jr. Honorable Benjamin A. Gilman State Historic Preservation Officer
Mr. Orin Lehman
Commissioner
Parks and Recreation
Agency Building #1
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12238

NR Byers/bjr

4/3/80

(Resource Name) new york (State) (Completed by) STATUS: 3. NHL 4. TR \_\_\_ 5. MRA \_\_\_ 1. MISSING \_\_\_\_ 6. OVER-7. NPS - \_\_\_\_ UNDOCUMENTED 2. REMOVED/ 8. DOE - \_\_\_\_ 9. RESTRICTED DEMOLISHED OWNER OBJECTION **EXPLANATION:** 1 Missing Status: Entire Folder ( ); Nomination ( ); Map(s) ( ); Photos ( ) Available on: Microfiche ( ); Optical Disk ( ) (Cause for removal) (NHL Name, if different than NRHP Name) (Date Designated) (If multi-state/county TR, state/county where filed and location) (TR or MRA Name) (If multi-state/county MRA, state/county where filed and location) (Location of oversize file) (Current source of partial documentation) (Target Date) COMMENTS (Where found, or source of replacement) (Date Found/Replaced)

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Register of Historic Places Locator Card

WASO 21 JAN. 1986