



NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Robert B. Tierney
Chairman

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CITIES SERVICE BUILDING AND FIRST-FLOOR LOBBY NAMED LANDMARKS

Designation Covers the First-Floor Lobby and Exterior of the 66-Story Art Deco Showpiece, Formerly the Headquarters of AIG and Currently One of the Tallest Buildings in Lower Manhattan



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission today voted unanimously to landmark the exterior and first-floor lobby of the Cities Service Building, the 66-story Art Deco tower at 70 Pine St. that most recently served as the headquarters of American International Group, a financial services company and insurer.

The 952-foot setback skyscraper, crowned by a tiered glass lantern and stainless steel spire, is considered one of one of the most recognizable buildings on Manhattan's skyline.

Completed in 1932, the building was constructed by Henry L. Doherty, the founder of the Cities Service Company, an energy holding company that was chartered in 1910 and renamed Citgo in 1965. Doherty constructed the tower to enlarge the company's existing offices in two adjacent, but separate buildings on Wall and Pine streets, both of which have been demolished/

"Many Art Deco skyscrapers were built in New York City in the late 1920s and 1930s, but few from this era can boast the lavish interiors, intricate metalwork, and visibility of this building," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney.

When it was completed, the Cities Service Building was the third tallest structure in the world, behind the Chrysler and Empire State buildings. The tower is located on a trapezoidal lot bounded by Cedar, Pine and Pearl Streets, and was designed by the architecture firm of Clinton & Russell, Holton & George, which specialized in office buildings and apartment houses, including Graham Court, the Aphorpe Apartments and the Beaver and Broad Exchange buildings, all New York City landmarks. James Stewart & Company, which built City Center, the U.S. Courthouse on Foley Square and the New York Central Building, was the general contractor.



Doherty took the unusual step of financing the new tower through a stock offering, rather than a mortgage, and incorporated other innovations into the project such as a series of escalators that linked the building's lower floors, double-deck elevators and private terraces enclosed by steel railings coated with aluminum lacquer.

The exterior of 70 Pine St. is clad in white brick, light gray Indiana limestone, and speckled rose and black granite. The Pine and Cedar street sides each have a pair of monumental arched



entrances that are framed with limestone reliefs with repeating images of the Cities Service logo _ a triangle set within a trefoil _ and elaborate aluminum ornamentation, such as stepped pyramids that echo the building's spire and butterflies pecking at sunflowers.

In addition, each of the eastern entrance portals on Pine and Cedar streets display a 14-foot-high limestone model of the building, which is otherwise impossible to see in its entirety from the street (see photo at left).

The aluminum decorative details found on the exterior of 70 Pine St. re-appear in the building's main first-floor lobby, now the City's 112th interior landmark. An interior landmark is a space that not only meets the requirements for landmark status under the City's landmarks law, but must also be "customarily" open to the public, which means it was originally intended for use by the public. The lobby of the Woolworth Building, the Grand Central Terminal Concourse, and numerous Broadway theaters are examples of interior landmarks.

The Cities Service Building's first-floor lobby, consisting of marble walls, floors and staircases, as well as molded plaster ceilings, was designed by Clinton & Russell, Holton & George, the architecture firm responsible for the exterior.

"The lobby is not only a superb example of the Art Deco style, it's one of the most stunning office building lobbies in New York City," said Chairman Tierney.



Other remarkable features of the lobby include cast glass lighting fixtures, a ceiling decorated with a pattern that suggests light waves and aluminum figurative panels covering the elevator doors, which were designed by Rene P. Chambellan, a celebrated architectural sculptor.



The elevator door surrounds topped by a triangular glass indicator in the shape of the Cities Service logo, and the panels depict a woman holding an oil lamp and a man with what appears to be an electric turbine.

Aside from Cities Service, other noteworthy tenants have included the investment firm Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Beane and McGovern's, a 25,000-square-foot athletic facility that occupied the seventh floor and included handball and squash courts and a gymnasium. It was owned by Artie McGovern, a former broker and trainer whose clients included Babe Ruth, and reportedly drew 1,000 visitors a day.

Cities Service Company eventually became one of the largest corporations in the United States, controlling approximately 150 energy firms throughout North America. The building served as its headquarters until 1972, and was sold in 1976 to AIG, which refurbished the exterior and lobby in the 1990s. The building was sold in August 2009 to Sahn Eagle LLC, a real estate developer.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the mayoral agency responsible for protecting and preserving New York City's architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 27,000 buildings, including 1,287 individual landmarks, 112 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks, 102 historic

districts and 16 historic district extensions in all five boroughs. Under the City's landmarks law, considered among the most powerful in the nation, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough.

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