



PDHonline Course C646 (4 PDH)

Rockefeller Center: *City Within A City*

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2013

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Rockefeller Center



City Within A City

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Part 1

Future City

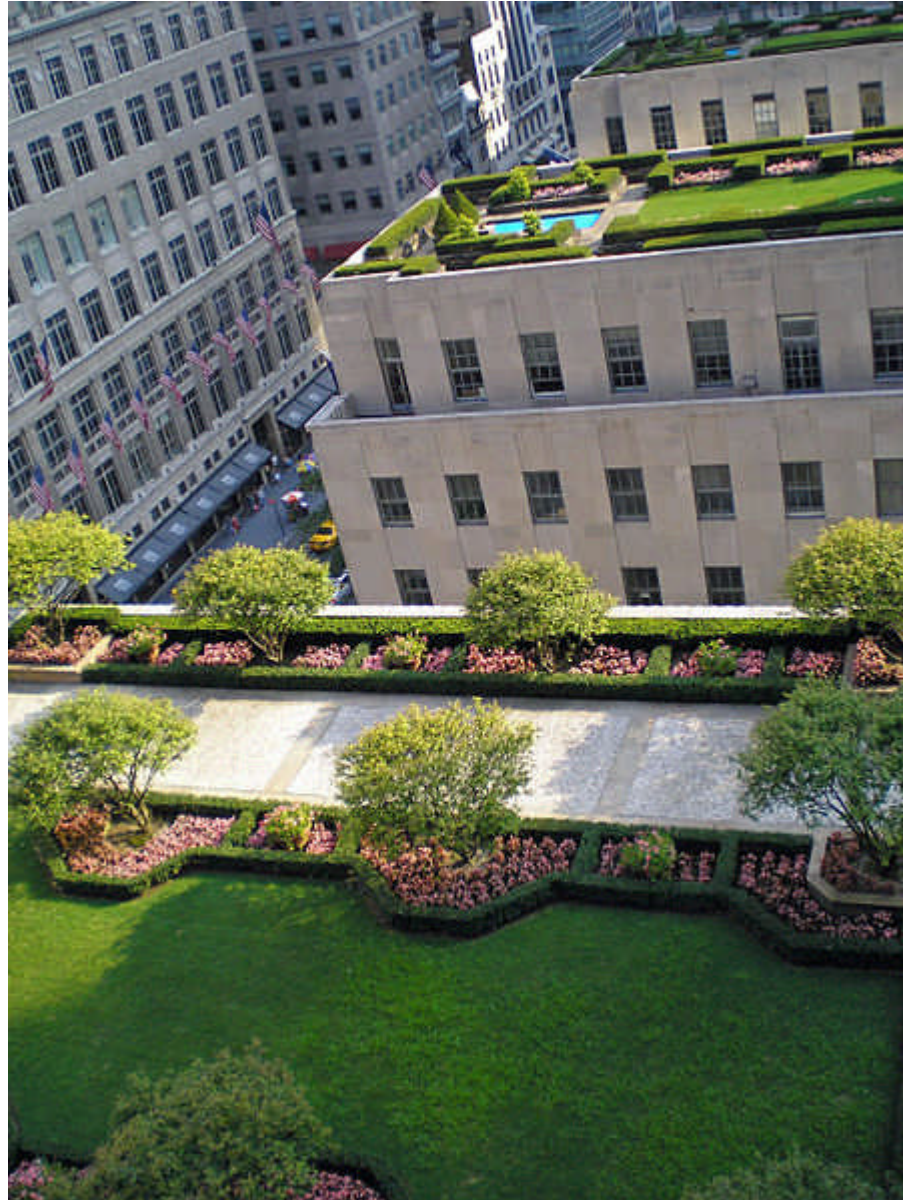
The Board of Strategy



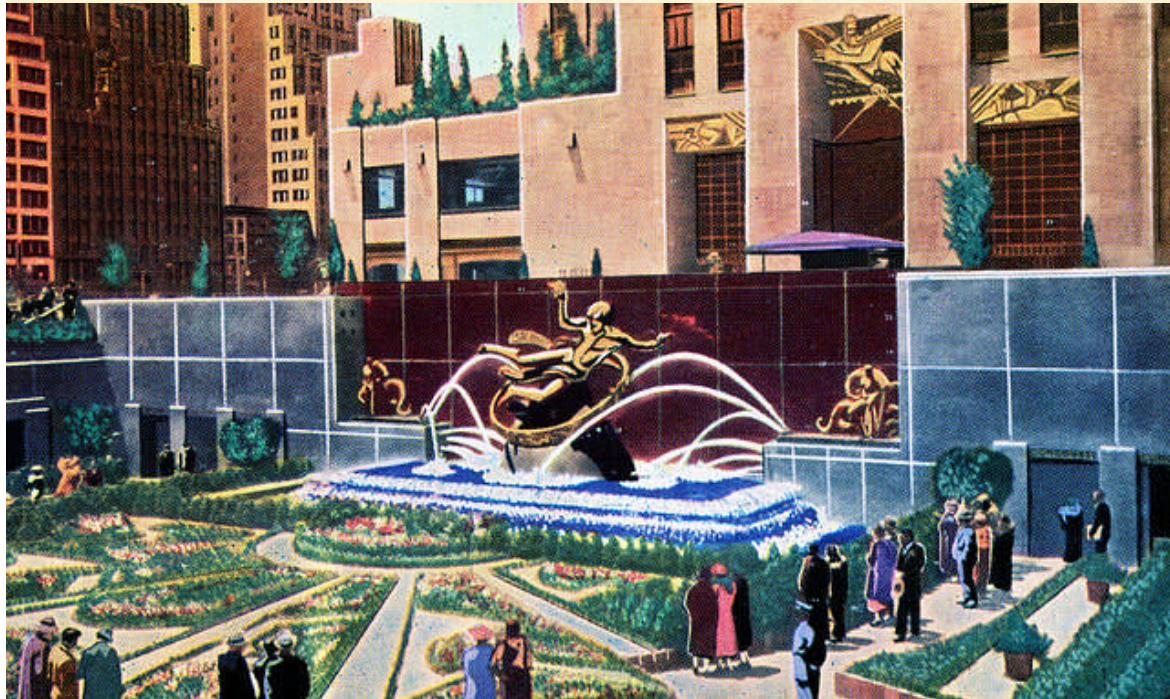
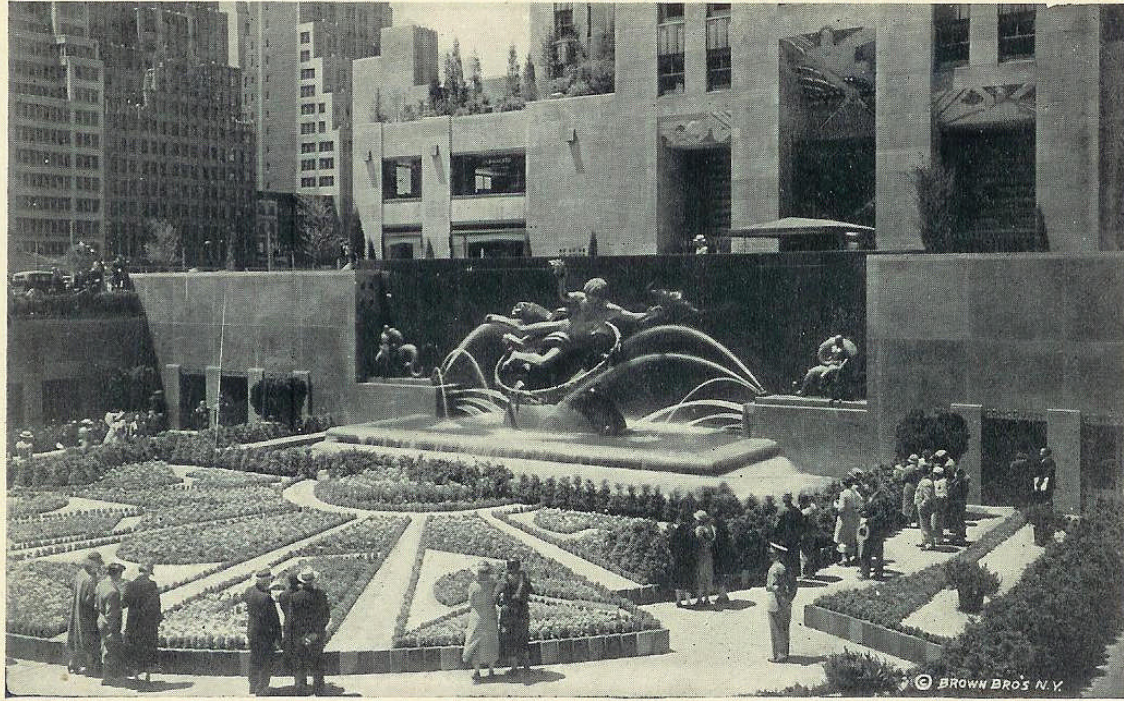
“Build a city to accommodate a floating population of 200,000 people on an area of one-fifth of a square mile! That, in effect, was the command issued to the board of strategy given the task of planning Rockefeller Center, New York’s latest wonder. In their control, the builders had \$250,000,000 – enough money to build five power dams like Muscle Shoals, or to drill a twenty-two-mile tunnel under the English channel and still have \$100,000,000 to spare...It is literally a city standing on end, a city of gardens, plazas, theaters, studios, offices and shops driven into the blue skyline until it is visible to ships at sea or, on other occasions, loses itself in the clouds...”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933





12A:—FLOWER FESTIVAL IN "SUNKEN PLAZA"—ROCKEFELLER CENTRE, NEW YORK





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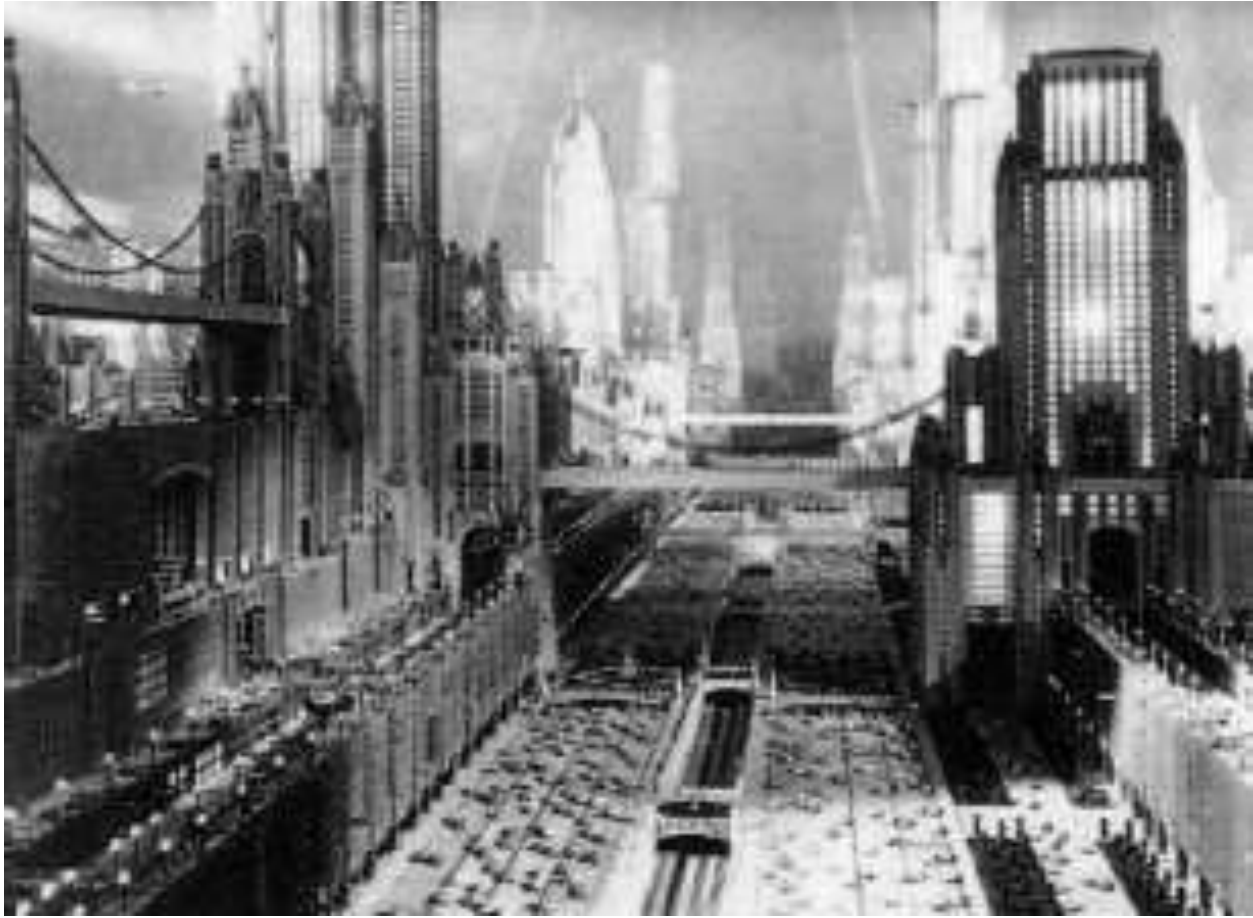






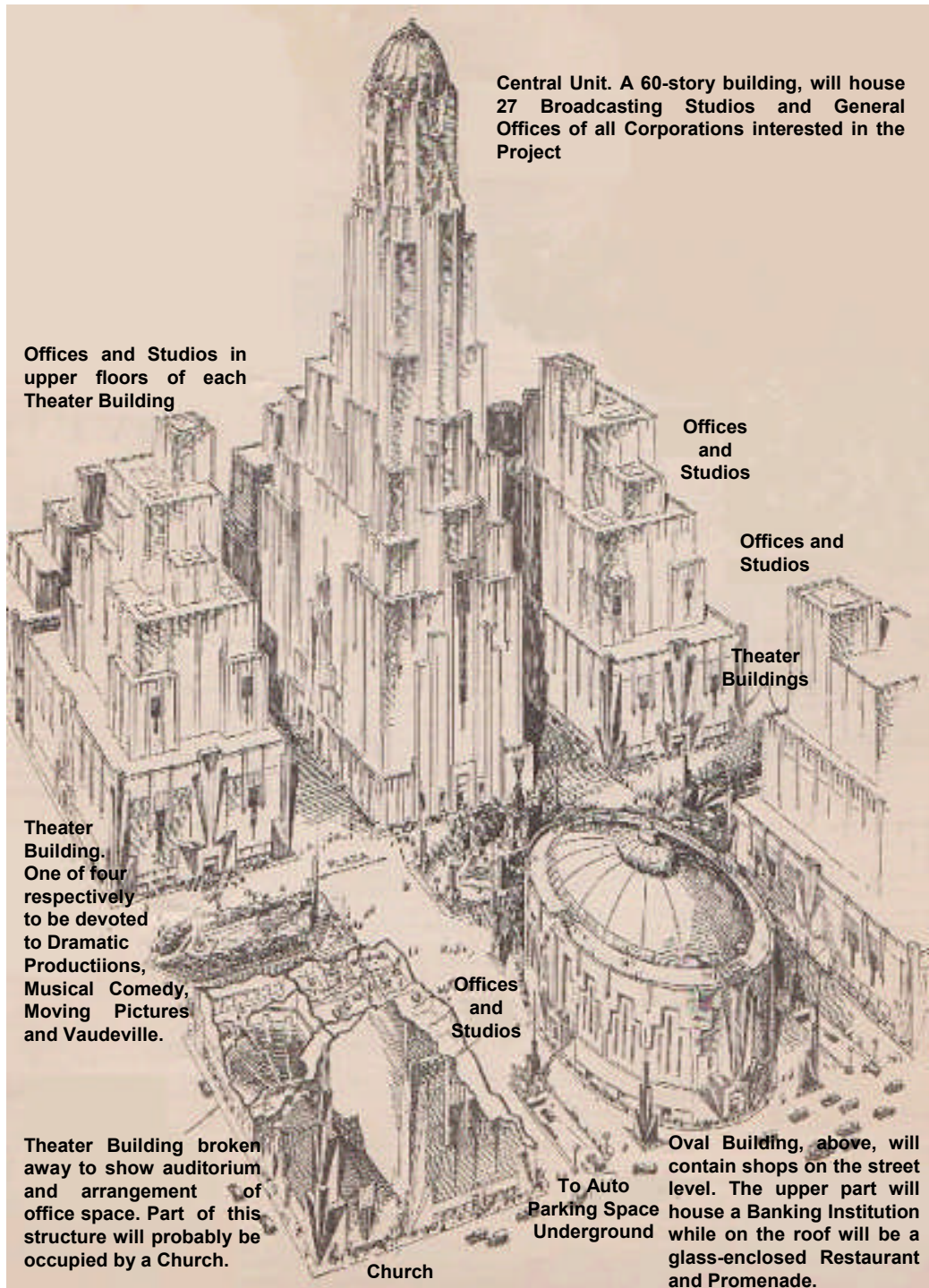
“...With \$250,000,000 in its pocket, the board of strategy soon found its chief concern was what not to do with it. People from all over the world offered ideas and bushels of them were sifted down to a few pertinent facts. Imaginary schemes of grandeur, staggering visions of transparent buildings, suspended highways and Chinese pergolas all went the way they had come, as also did a man from Georgia and one from California offering to sell mountains...”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933



A Towered Town

“A Towered town of a thousand wonders, a ‘Radio City,’ will arise within three years in the heart of New York. It will combine radio, motion picture, and possibly television activities with drama, opera, symphony music, and vaudeville into one huge nerve center for national, and probably worldwide, dissemination of entertainment and education...”
Popular Science Monthly, September 1930



“...When finished in the fall of 1933, a sixty-story skyscraper, housing twenty-seven broadcasting studios, some of them three stories high, will tower over the group, which will include four large theaters provided with radio and television broadcasting apparatus, one for vaudeville, one for talkies, one for plays, and one for musical comedies. The vaudeville theater will seat 7,000 persons, and the movie house 5,000. The musical comedy theater will be a ‘proving ground,’ successful productions to be given wider audience through motion pictures, radio, and, perhaps, television. A great symphony hall, which would be equipped for radio and television, also is considered. The heart of the group will be a beautiful, low, oval building, containing shops and bank offices and topped by a garden restaurant. Other office structures and perhaps a skyscraper church building will complete the ‘Radio City.’

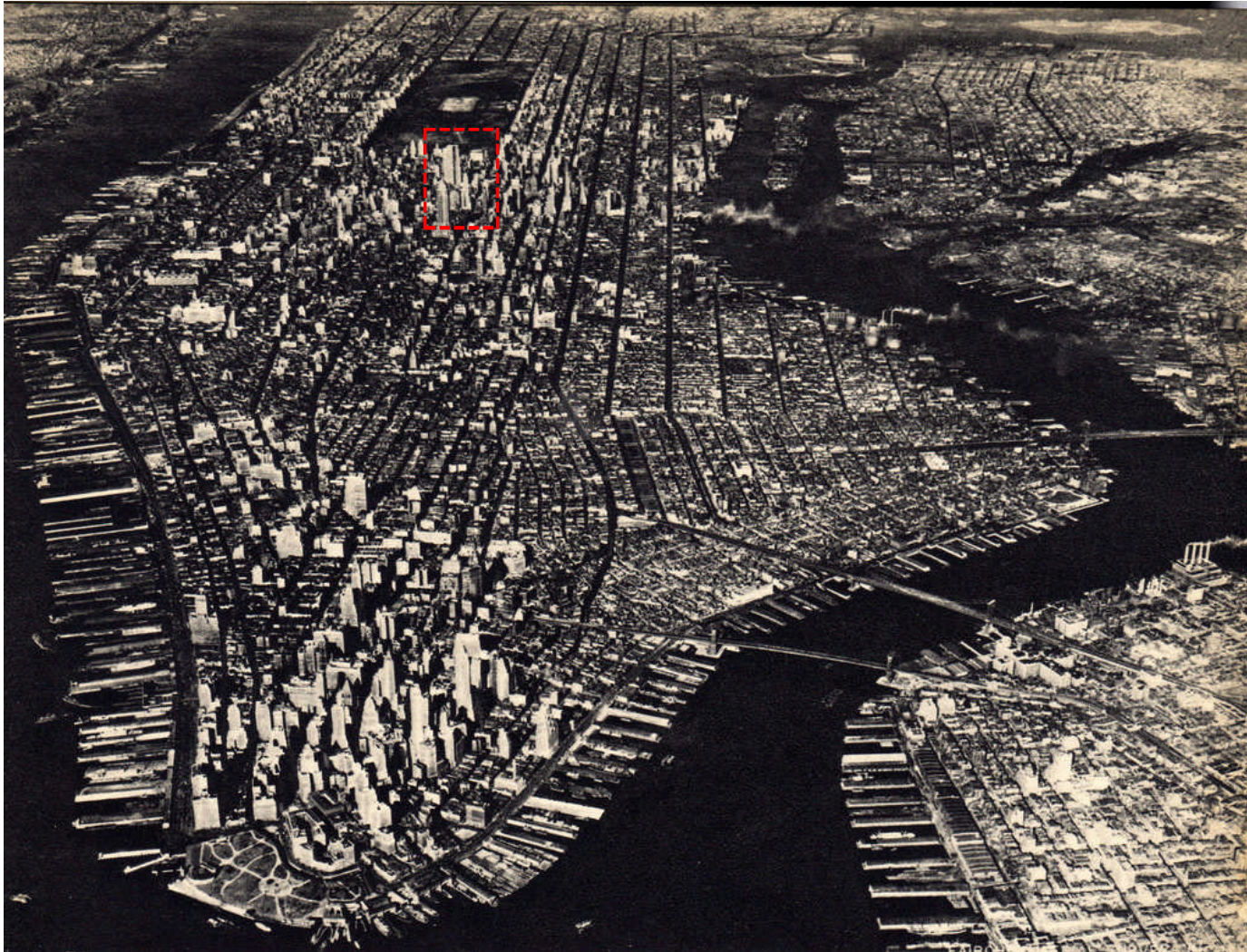
Popular Science Monthly, September 1930
Left: caption: “Our artist gives you his idea of the gigantic structures that will be grouped in ‘Radio City’”



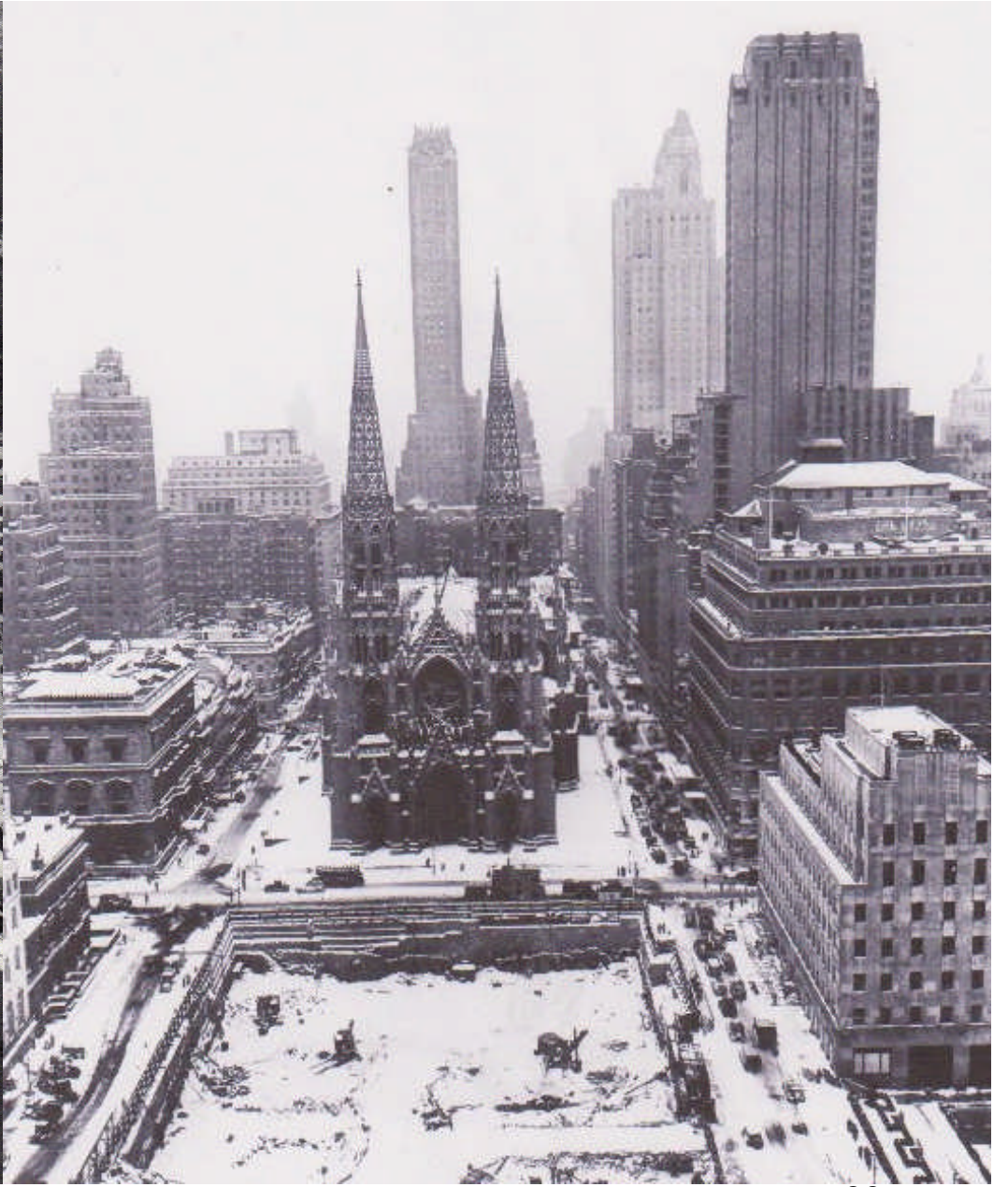
“...Work will begin on the project this autumn. Financed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., it involves the investment of \$250,000,000 for the razing of buildings now occupying three entire city blocks and the construction of a group of magnificent structures to be equipped with the latest devices for oral and visual broadcasting. They will be leased and operated by the Radio Corporation of America, the National Broadcasting Co., the R.C.A. Victor Corporation of America, the Radio-Keith-Orpheum Corporation and its subsidiary, Radio Pictures, and R.C.A. Photophone, Inc...”

Popular Science Monthly, Sept. 1930

Left: John D. Rockefeller, Jr.









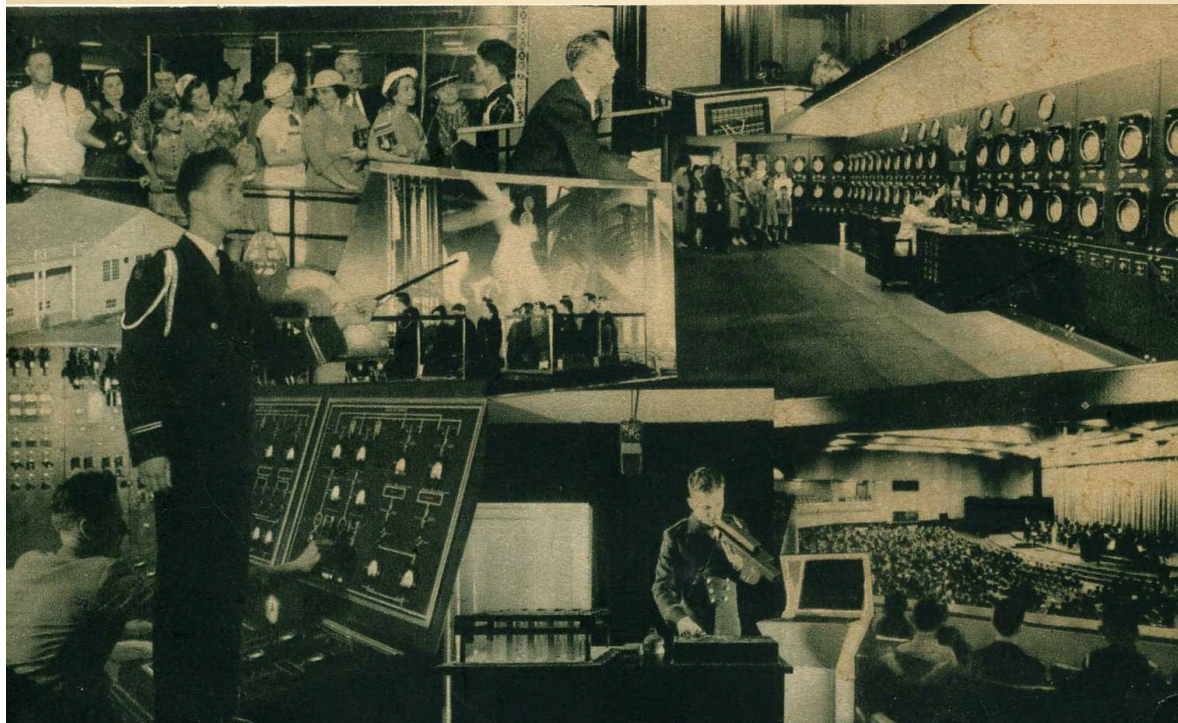


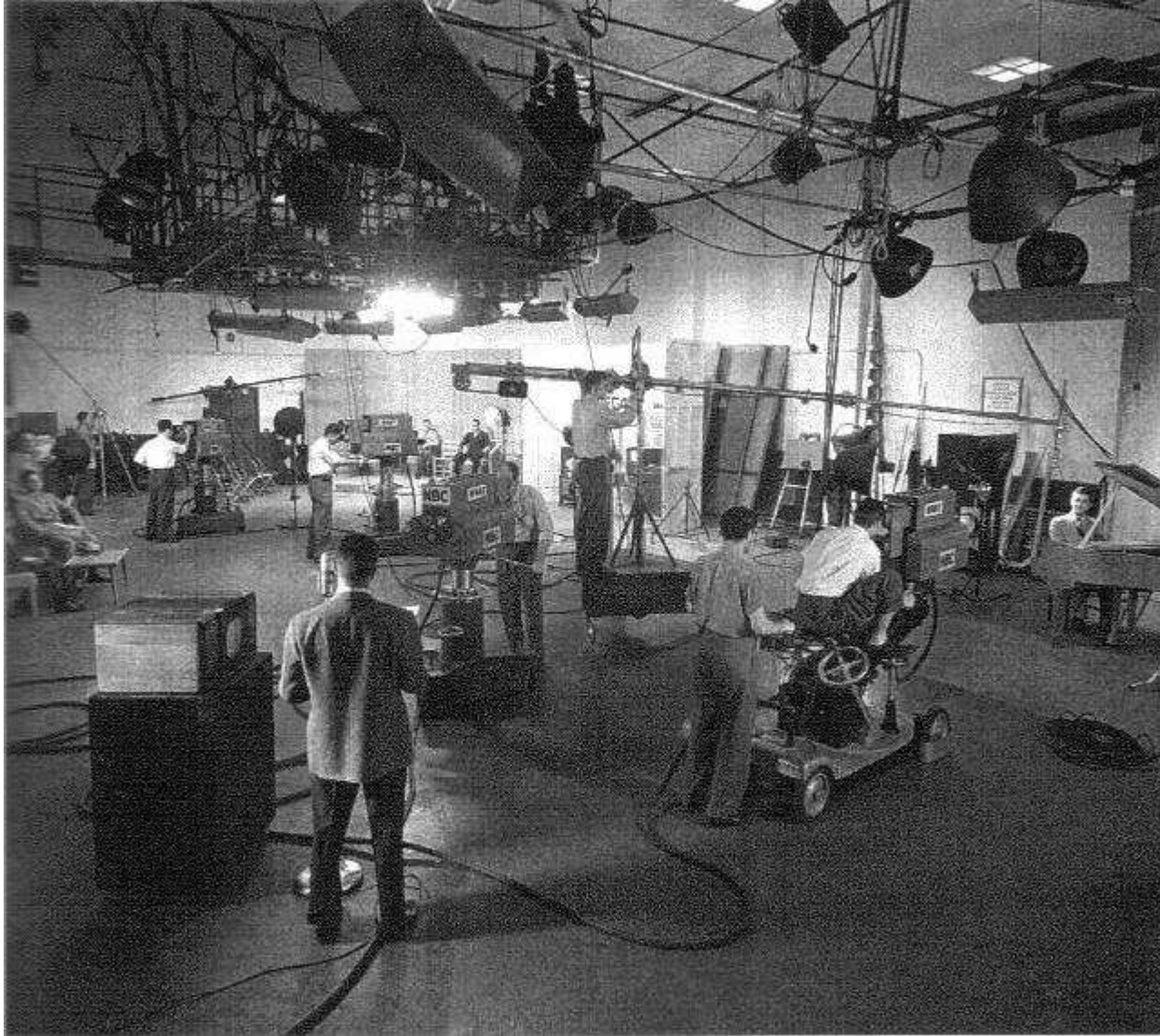


Above: caption: “NBC Studios Lobby, 30 Rockefeller Plaza”

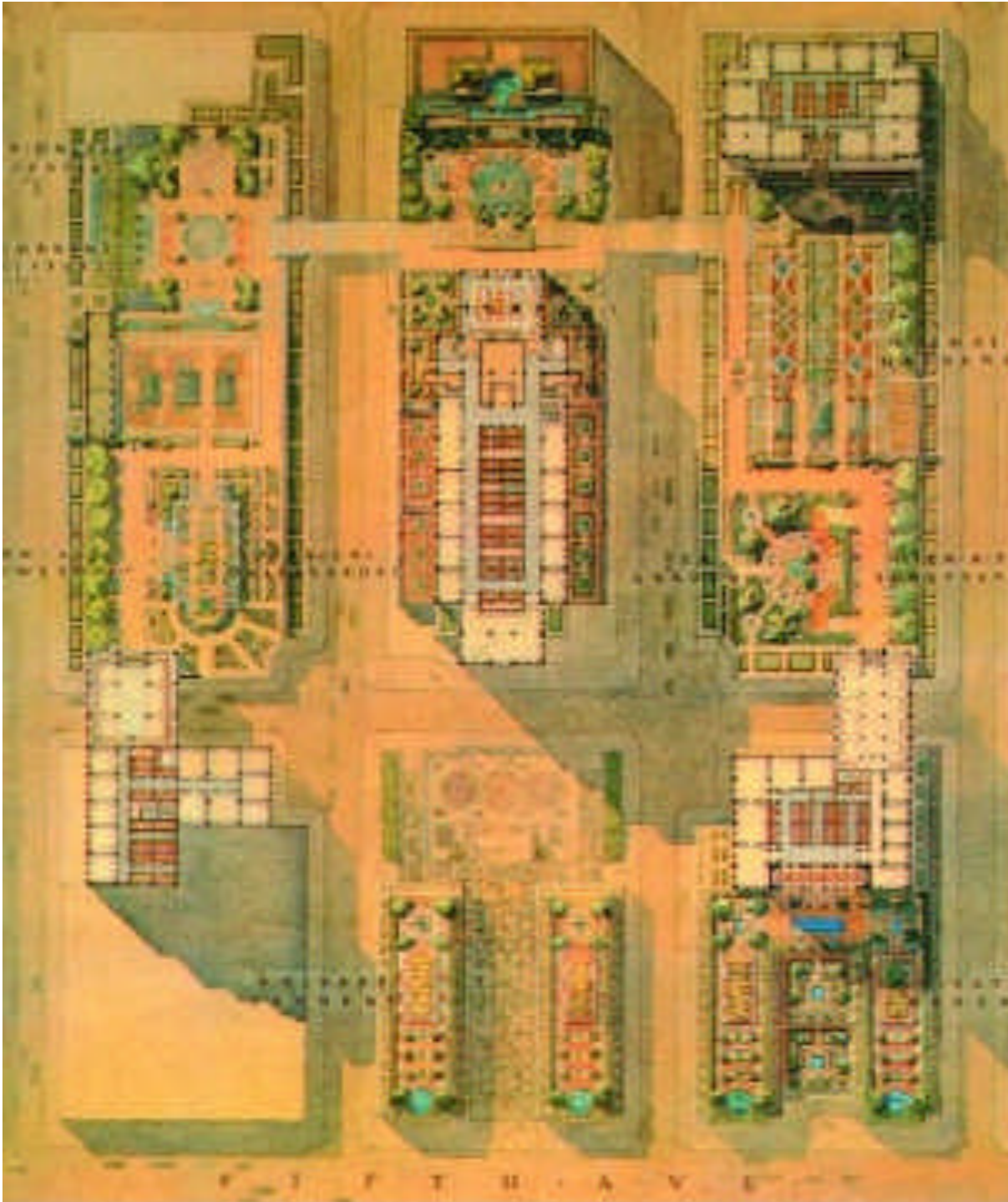








This is What Has Been Done



“...The planners finally decided a modern city intended to become a world capital of business, merchandising and recreation should be built contrary to ancient models, and this is what has been done. Instead of building a large basin-shaped city, they modeled one after a mountain – the highest point in the center. And near the base they placed fair sized molehills. This interesting plan allows the people living in the highest levels to look down upon the roof gardens of their neighbors, and the people in the lower levels to look down upon a sunken plaza. And the whole populace enjoys unobstructed sunlight and circulating air...”
Popular Mechanics, March 1933





International Gardens, Rockefeller Center













PROWENADE CAFE, LOWER PLAZA, ROCKEFELLER CENTER, NEW YORK CITY



ROCKEFELLER CENTER SUMMER OUTDOOR RESTAURANT, NEW YORK CITY

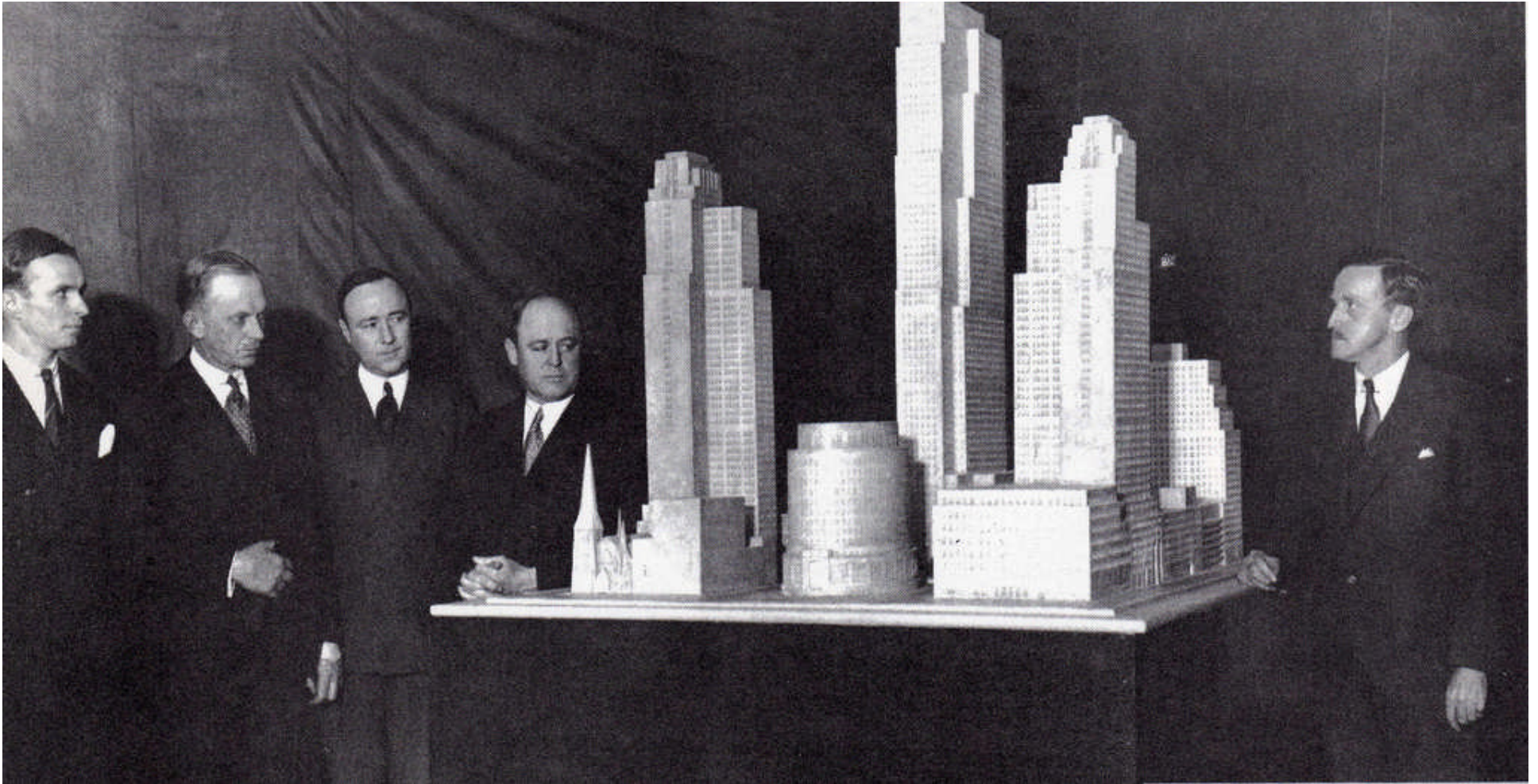


Rockefeller Plaza Outdoor Ice Skating Pond, Rockefeller Center New York City





The Heavy Hand of John Law



“...The strategists next sought the best method of carrying out their plan. Each states his notion on an ideal city, and one by one, these notions vanished in a ruthless process of elimination. Zoning laws limit the bulk of buildings; fire laws govern the dimensions of floors and walls. And then they had to provide enough space to cover the project’s operating expenses. A thousand considerations governed every plan. What they finally chose was a compromise between art, engineering and the heavy hand of John Law...”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933

Above: model of the final design of Rockefeller Center as unveiled to the press on March 5th 1931

Architectural Aberrations

“Radio City is ugly. Its exterior is revoltingly dull and dreary”

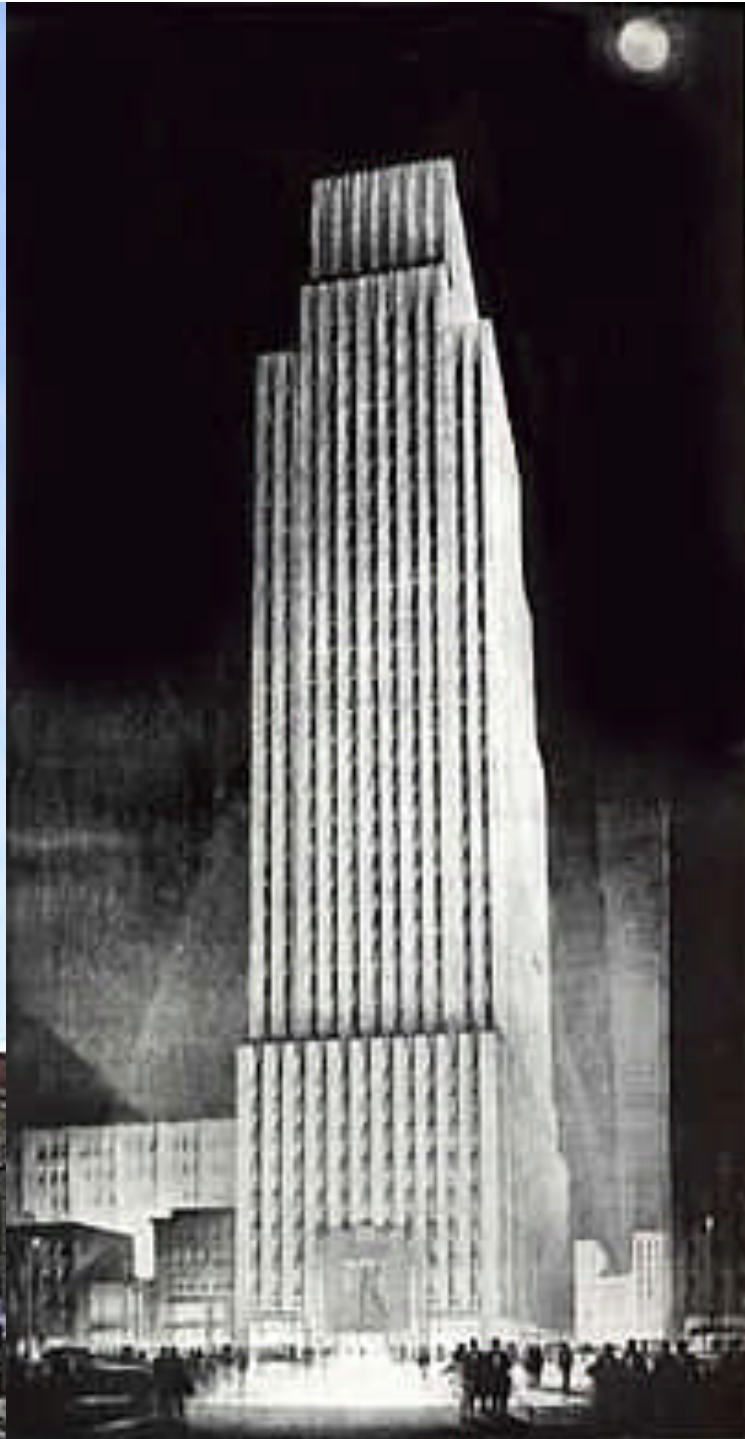
Herald Tribune

RE: when on March 5th 1931 a tentative model for the project was unveiled, it was greeted by almost universal disdain. The *New York Times* was also dismissive, calling the complex a composition of “architectural aberrations.” Many alterations would be made to the original plans, but the press’ initial critical reception was representative of the formidable task ahead.



In late 1930/early 1931, the plans for the “Radio City” complex were modified. The Architects redesigned the complex with a uniform architectural style, heavily influenced by architect Raymond Hood’s *Daily News Building* and the stringent requirements of NYC’s *Zoning Law of 1916*. An innovative design was included for the twenty-story *Oval Building* and The *RCA Building* was redesigned, adding twenty additional floors (from fifty to seventy-stories). In October 1931, the *British Empire Building* and *La Maison Francaise* replaced the oval building in the design; returning to the earlier arrangement of an axial promenade flanked by low buildings ending in a plaza. In March 1931, the complex was renamed: *Rockefeller Center* despite J.D. Rockefeller, Jr.’s misgivings about using the family name for the project (after the *Metropolitan Opera* had withdrawn from the project, the name “Metropolitan Square” appeared misleading and inappropriate).

Above: architects reviewing a design model



Hood left the Gothic style that he used for the *Tribune Tower Building* in *Chicago* of 1924 (left) for the modernist movement with his design for the *Daily News Building* of 1930 (right). It was the first large-scale building in NYC that realized a modern design, but within the aesthetic canons of the prevalent *Art Deco* style.

Less is More



The year 1931 was critical in the history of *New York City* architecture. In that year, the *International Style* - the modernist movement which originated in post-WWI *Europe*, was consolidated in the *United States* and, especially, in *Manhattan* with the construction of the *McGraw-Hill Building* (left). Modernist architecture gave preference to the function of the building rather than its ornamentation. This rationalist idea whereby “less is more” developed in *Germany* with *Walter Gropius’ Bauhaus* design school. Another German architect; *Ludwing Mies Van der Rohe*, began his career designing buildings where the predominant material was glass. In *France*, *Le Corbusier* designed buildings that revealed the structure; predominantly bare concrete covered with glass. Nearly all these European architects would not produce works in the U.S. until late 1940s, but by the end of the 1920s they were influencing local architects. One of them was *Raymond Hood*.

Left: architect Raymond Hood’s McGraw-Hill Building, 1931

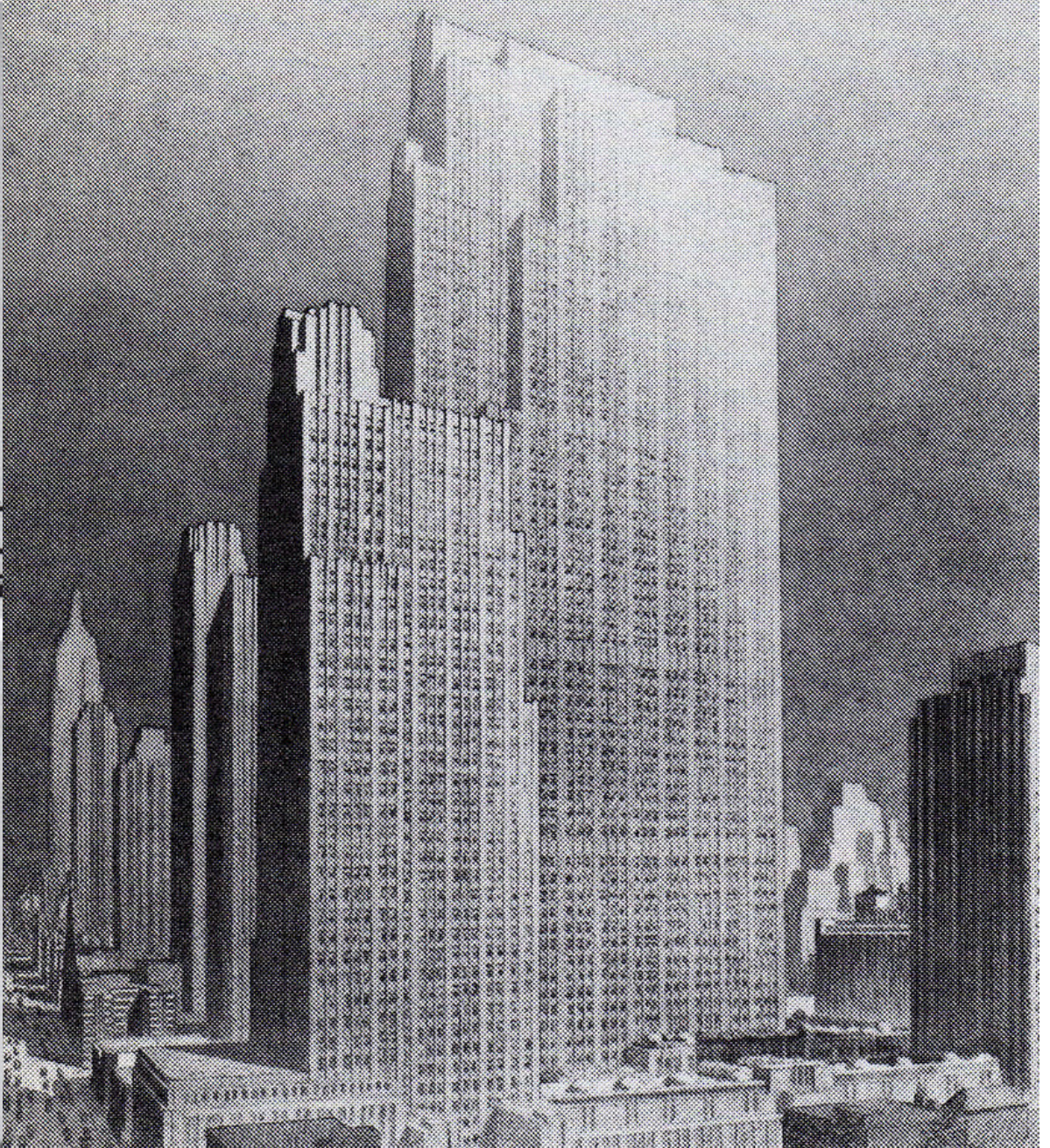
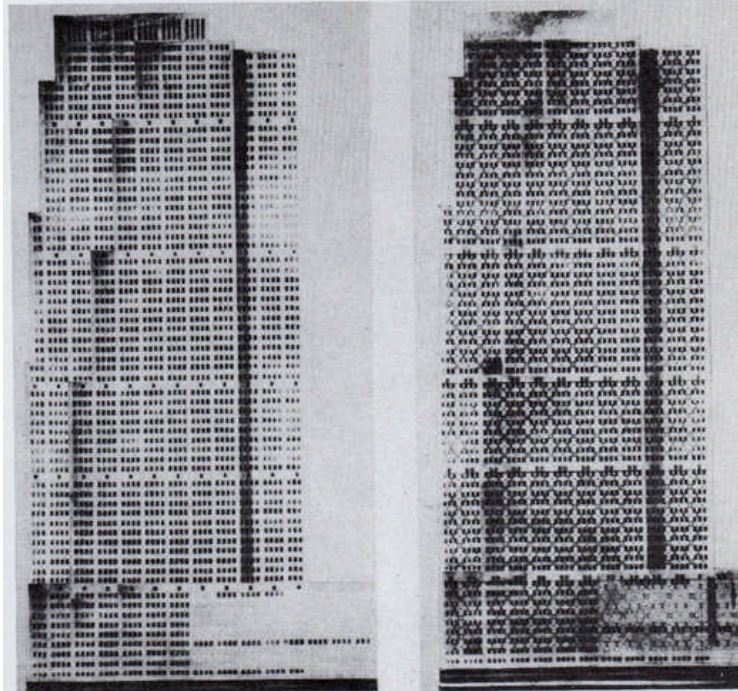
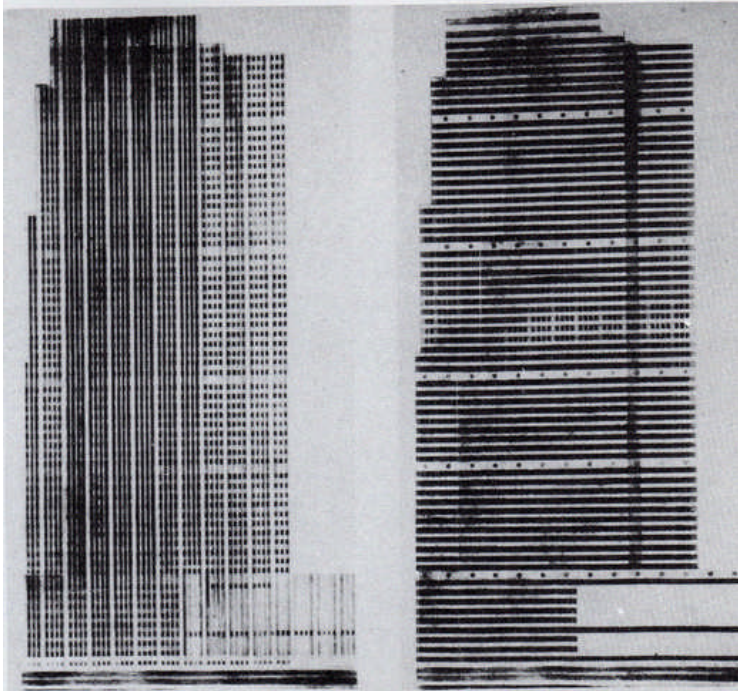


“It’s my building, but it’s their skyline”

Raymond Hood

Above: architect Raymond Hood

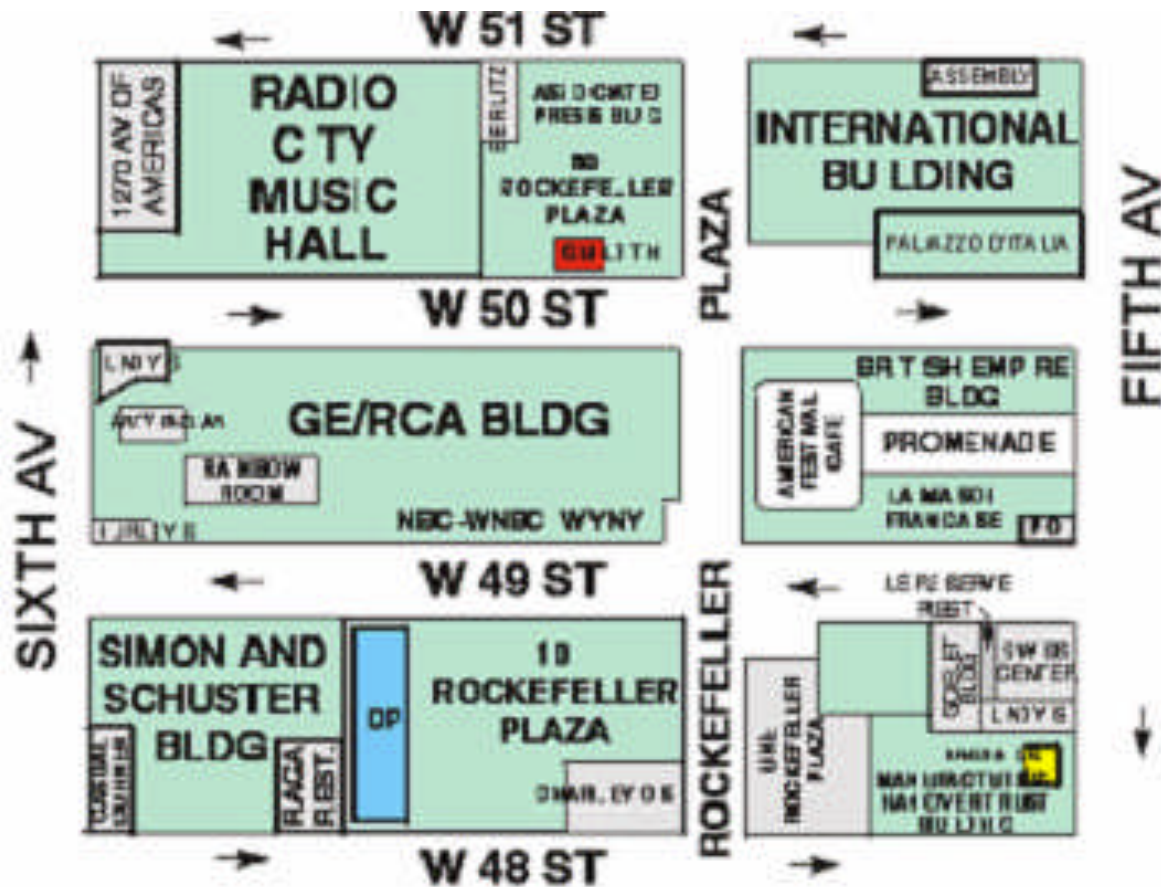
Left: the McGraw-Hill Building with its distinctive green terra-cotta facade



Above & Left: caption: “Preliminary studies for RCA Building by Raymond Hood, 1931”



Before RC, architect *Raymond Hood* had envisioned another “City Within a City” in *Chicago, Illinois* featuring four tall towers flanked by low-rise office blocks framing a broad north-south mall east of *Michigan Avenue* (between *Randolph Street* and the *Chicago River*). One of two similar proposals considered for the land at the time, Hoods 1929 plans for the “Terminal Park” development were thwarted by the stock market crash in October of that year. When Hood, who first rose to fame in Chicago for his contest-winning *Tribune Tower* (1922) abandoned the Terminal Park plan, the property remained vacant for another thirty years. Nothing was constructed on the site until the late 1960s.



“...When such tenants as the National Broadcasting Company, the Radio Corporation of America, and others, had stated their space requirements, it was possible to know how to plan the individual buildings, and this also determined the time for commencing construction. All the buildings were located and numbered on a preliminary plot plan, and each was placed in charge of a job captain...”

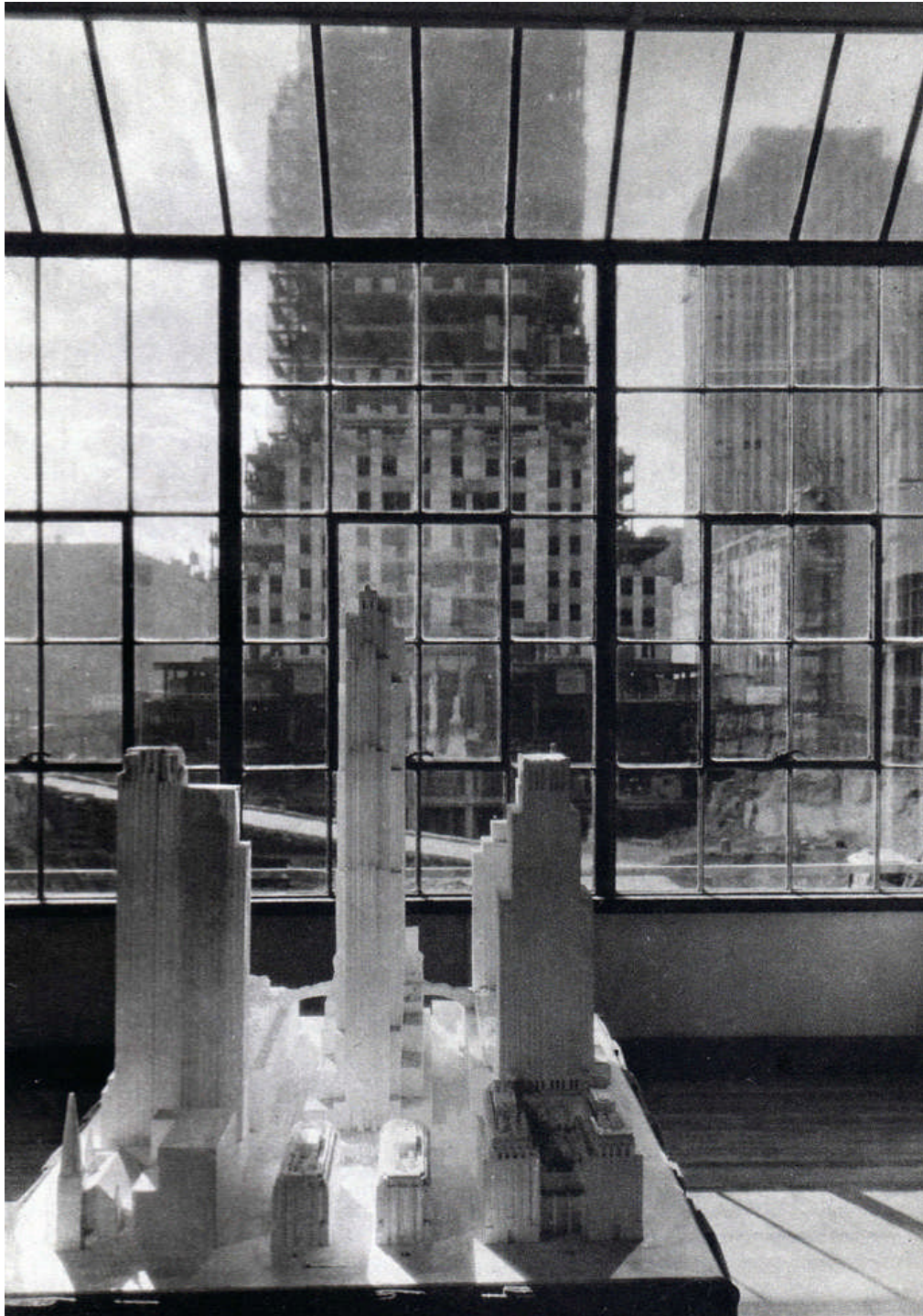
Popular Mechanics, March 1933

Left: Rockefeller Center location map



“...Almost overnight the wreckers came upon the scene. Caravans of trucks carried off the wreckage of scores of buildings at the site of the new city. Never in history was a city built on such exacting schedule. The workmen were maneuvered like army regiments...”

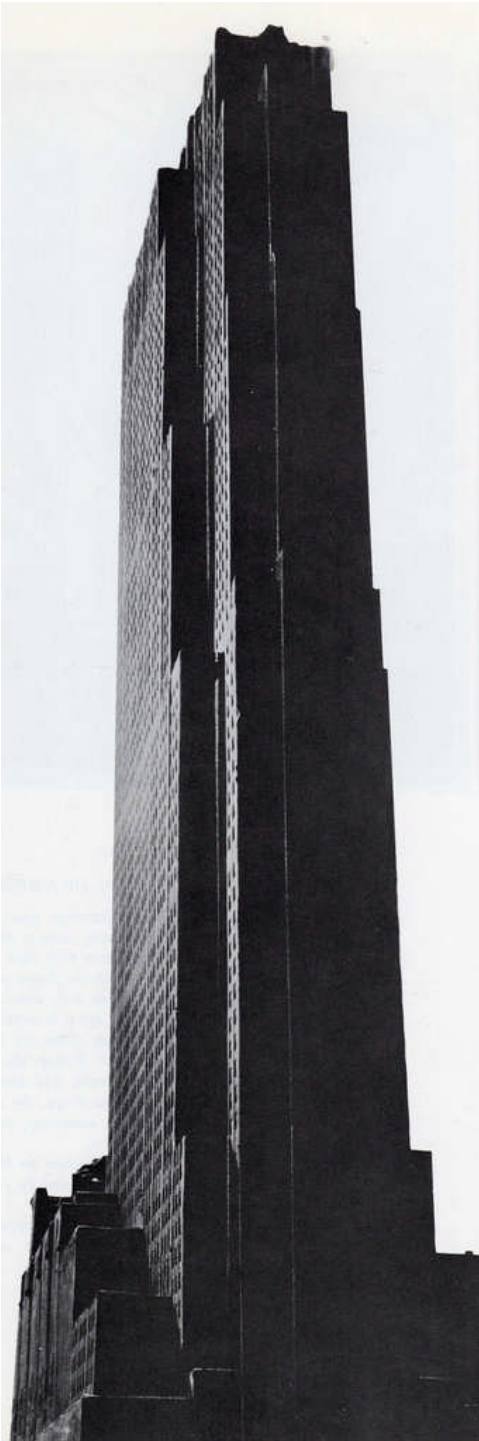
Popular Mechanics, March 1933



“...Locked in their quarters, the board of strategy debated the issues of design and construction and how to defeat their enemy, time. Clay and plaster models of the various buildings were before them. They examined schemes until they could no longer hold off time; then they gave the awaited order of attack. Dispatch bearers rushed their commands to the drafting rooms, where corps of men in shirt sleeves reduced the three-dimension plaster models to two-dimension schemes on paper. Next came the blueprints, which other dispatch bearers rushed to city officials for approval and to contractors for execution...”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933

***Left: final design model in foreground,
construction in progress in background***

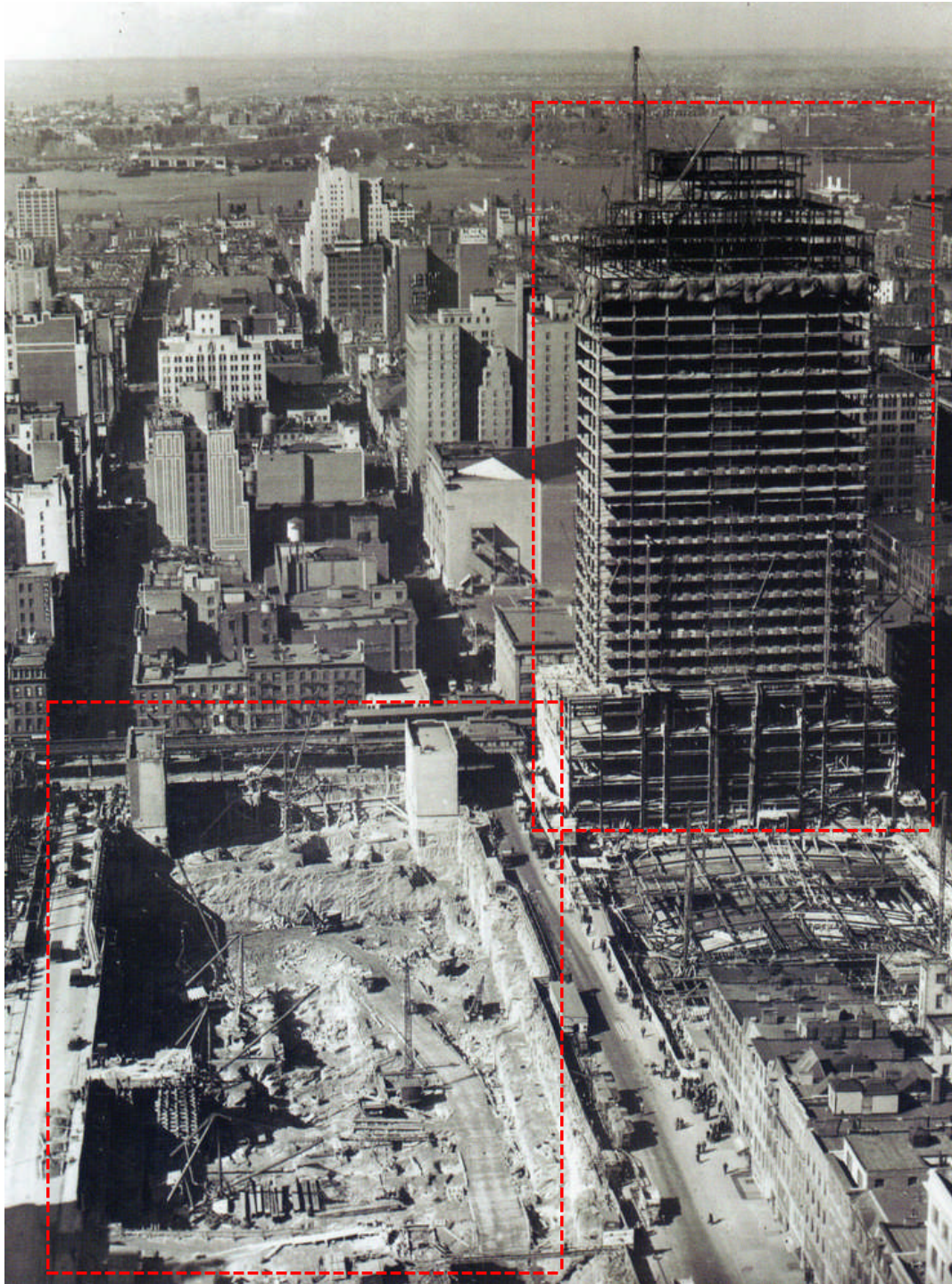


“...Ideas grew and shapes crystallized, the plans became more and more detailed. The first blueprints were on a scale of one-eighth of an inch to the foot. The drafting regiments, working at high speed, soon enlarged the entire conception to quarter, half, and even full-size drawings. Then specification writers began describing the numerous materials which might be purchased for the work. Contractors were invited to bid. Not always the lowest bidder won, but the man whose reputation and resources inspired the most confidence. Bids turned out unexpectedly reasonable, and it was possible to order white limestone instead of brick for the face of a seventy-story building, notwithstanding that brick prices fell thirty per cent in the course of several days. Bidding was so spirited and conditions so favorable that certain construction, originally valued at about ninety cents per cubic foot, cost about one-third less...”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933

Left: caption: “Model of the RCA Building, Dec. 1931”





“...Meanwhile, the site had been cleared and the iron workers marched on the scene. Simultaneously, transports came up to the front on train schedule and dumped their loads. The mouths of furnaces belched forth the steel soon to be riveted into the framework of the buildings. Agents in Europe and all over the states searched for new or better building materials, others were sent to mines, quarries, laboratories, and manufactories...”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933

Left: caption: “The steel framing of the RKO Building is topped out (right) while excavations are in progress on the RCA Building site (left), Christmas 1931”

A Code of Disciplined Efficiency



“...The huge, swift and widely scattered operations necessary to build Rockefeller Center would have been impossible in any but the present century, when all the arts and crafts are knit by a code of disciplined efficiency. On the battlefield and behind the lines, it is estimated that 75,000 men joined hands in the fabrication of this city. In all, they will have labored for 10,000,000 days when the project stands completed...”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933

Left: caption: “The construction work in March 1932 when the RCA Building’s steel frame started to rise and the RKO Building was nearly fully enclosed”



“...Testing, inspecting, and checking the work and materials required the attention of a small army. As the contractors purchased materials, they were required to submit four samples for approval. These were tested for strength, durability, appearance and quality. And if approved, other inspectors saw that those very materials were used. Besides the architects’ inspectors, there were city, fire, accident and insurance inspectors. And on the completion of each building, there was a general inspection by the owners, contractors, architects, and lessees...”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933

Left: caption: “RCA Building nearing completion”

Become the City Within a City



“...With its offices and shops, its proposed opera house, its music and variety hall, its cinema, its broadcasting studios, hanging gardens, and public plazas, Rockefeller Center becomes the city within a city.”

Popular Mechanics, March 1933

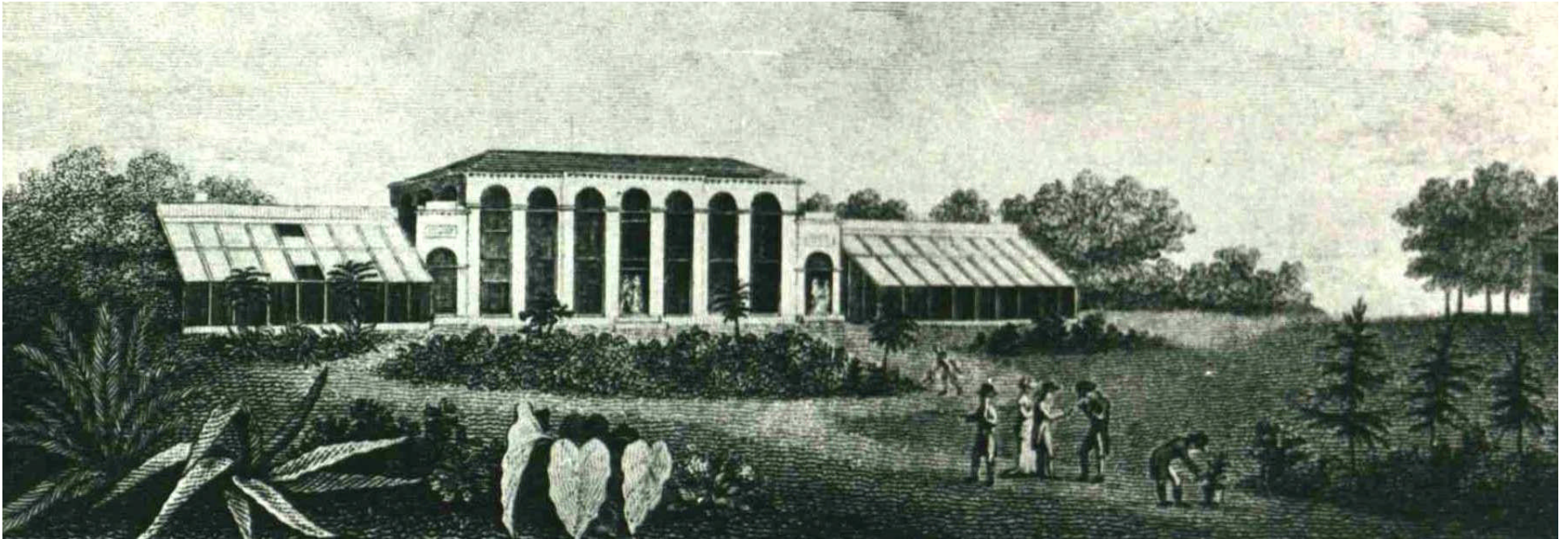
Left: caption: “Rockefeller Center, NY...a ‘Radio City’ skyscraper, 70 stories high, pierces the blue”

Part 2

The Upper Estate

The Elgin Botanical Garden

It was highly unusual that twelve acres of underdeveloped property with a single owner existed in midtown *Manhattan* in the *20th Century*. The story behind this phenomenon stretches back to the early days of the nation. *Dr. David Hosack* (1769-1835), a native New Yorker, was both brilliant and charming. He received a fine medical education in both *America* and *Great Britain*. His diagnostic insight during New York's *Yellow Fever* epidemic of 1797 led to his being taken into partnership by *Dr. Samuel Bard*, dean of the city's medical community. Hosack was a pioneer in American medicine; a severe critic of the practice of bleeding patients and an early advocate of vaccination, he was one of the first physicians in the *United States* to use a stethoscope. Impressive as were his medical skills, he could not save the life of his friend *Alexander Hamilton* whom he accompanied to the fatal duel (with *Aaron Burr*) held in *Weehawken, New Jersey*, in 1804. Hosack was also a firm believer in the curative power of plants and was professor at *Columbia College* of both *Botany* and *Materia Medica*; the study of the composition of medical remedies. His dream was to establish a botanical garden in NYC that would rival those of Europe such as *Kew Gardens* in *London*. When his efforts to have either Columbia or the *State of New York* underwrite his project failed, Hosack decided to take the task on himself. His efforts to find a suitable site led him to twenty acres lying between the *Middle Road* on the east (now *Fifth Avenue*) and the *Albany Road* to the west (now *Sixth Avenue*) which were part of the common lands of the city. Because the tract was rocky and lay some three miles north of the built-up part of *Manhattan Island*, the city fathers were glad to get rid of it. In 1801, Dr. Hosack agreed to pay \$4,807.36 in cash plus a "quitrent" of sixteen bushels of wheat per year. In 1810 he paid another \$285.71 in commutation of the quitrent and henceforth, he owned the property outright.



“The whole tract of land was intended by Professor Hosack for a botanical garden, the prime object of which was to be the collection and cultivation of native plants of this country, especially such as possess medicinal properties or are otherwise useful.”

American Journal of Pharmacy, 1908

Above: caption: “View of the Botanic Garden at Elgin in the vicinity of the City of New York.” Dr. Hosack christened his brainchild “The Elgin Botanical Garden” (after his father’s native town in *Scotland*) and he set about turning the tract into one of the wonders of 19th Century NYC. He enclosed the garden within a seven-foot high stone wall, constructed hothouses and a greenhouse, laid out elaborate beds for herbs and flowers and brought in more than 2K rare plants from around the world.

Dr. Hosack – famous for his elaborate parties, was characterized by a fellow physician as: “a man of profuse expenditure.” He had soon spent more than \$100K on the *Elgin Botanical Garden*, an enormous sum at the time. When his expectations that costs would be offset by the sale of medicinal plants and the products of his nursery were not realized, he turned to *Columbia College* and *New York State*. Once again he was turned down and in 1810 (the very year that he had made his final payment on the property) he sold it to the *State of New York* for \$75K. Without Hosack’s involvement, the botanical garden quickly deteriorated. Fences and buildings fell into disrepair and rare plants vanished. Within four years of the transfer, Hosack’s *Garden of Eden* had become an eyesore.

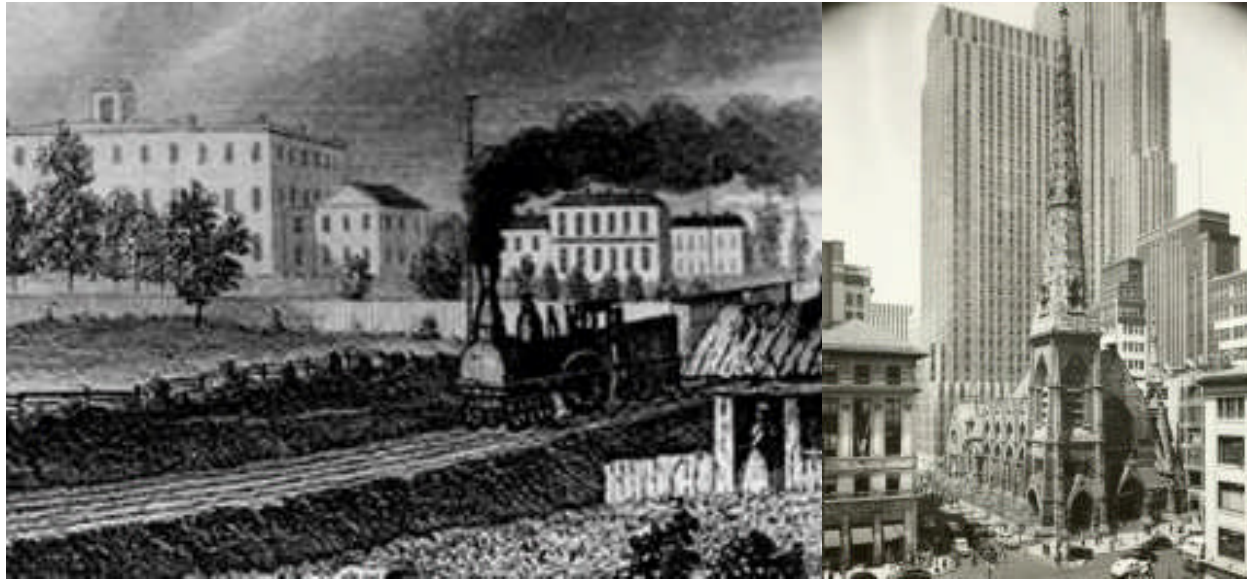
The Lower Estate



The subsequent linkage to *Columbia College*, which was to keep the site together, had little to do with Dr. Hosack. The college (above), located on what it called its “Lower Estate” - on *Park Place* between *Church Street* and *Broadway*, had long sought financial aid from *New York State*. While other educational and even religious institutions had received help, Columbia had been regularly rebuffed. Many believed this was due to its close association (before the Revolution) with the *Tory Anglican Church*. In 1814, the *State of New York* organized a lottery to help *Union* and *Hamilton College/s* and, once again, turned down Columbia when it asked for a share of the proceeds. But the state legislature, recognizing a way to be rid of Dr. Hosack’s decrepit botanical garden while offering something substantial to Columbia, presented the tract to the college. Columbia’s trustees, who had been seeking money to finance a move from the cramped quarters that had housed the college since its founding in 1754, felt slighted by the offer. ⁷⁹

“...was donated to Columbia College in 1814 on condition that it erect a new campus there within twelve years. The college succeeded in removing the restrictions and began to develop the property in the late 1830s...In 1854 Columbia finally commissioned Richard Upjohn to design new facilities on the site, and the site for St. Patrick’s Cathedral was purchased in the expectation that it would overlook the college gardens. But Upjohn’s designs proved too expensive for Columbia, which instead moved two blocks east, into the former Institute for the Deaf and Dumb...”

Robert A.M. Stern



In 1828, Columbia found a long-term tenant for the property who would pay cash. By the 1850s, when Columbia finally decided to make its move uptown, the property; now assessed at \$550K, had grown too valuable for the college to build on. Instead, Columbia bought the building housing the *New York Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb* (left) on *Madison Avenue* between *49th* and *50th Street/s* and settled there in 1857. To help pay for the move, Columbia sold sixteen lots at the corner of *Fifth Avenue* and *48th Street* for \$40K to the *Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas* (right). It divided the rest of the property into 272 lots and rented them under twenty-one year leases; renewable for an additional twenty-one years. Columbia had the right to purchase the buildings at a fair price if either the college or the tenant failed to renew. Four decades later, to finance its 1897 move to the new *Morningside Heights* campus, Columbia sold one block of its “Upper Estate” (between *47th* and *48th Street/s*) for \$3 million, reducing the tract to just under thirteen acres.



During the *Manhattan* real estate boom of the 1870s, Columbia's *Upper Estate* flourished. Along *Fifth Avenue*, four and five-story luxury townhouses sprang up, while in the cross streets behind them rose uniform rows of modest brownstones. By the dawn of the *20th Century*, most of the Fifth Avenue residences had been converted to shops and offices. While the brownstones close to Fifth Avenue continued to be desirable, those to the west (near the hustle and bustle of the *Sixth Avenue Elevated Railway*) had declined into low-rent rooming houses. By the 1920s, Columbia's property had degenerated into a notorious district of speak-easies and brothels.

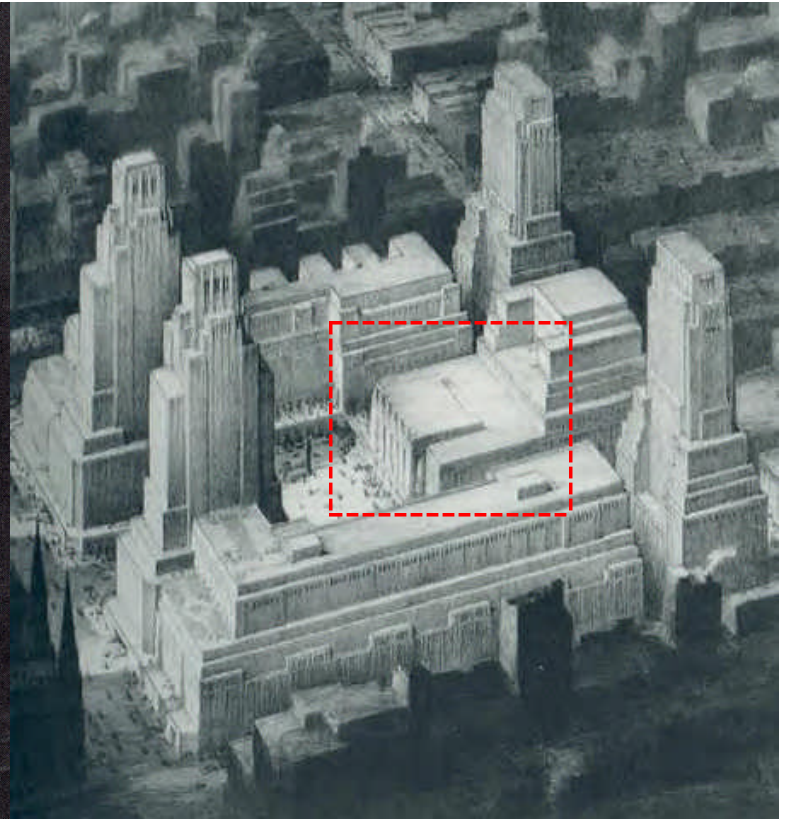
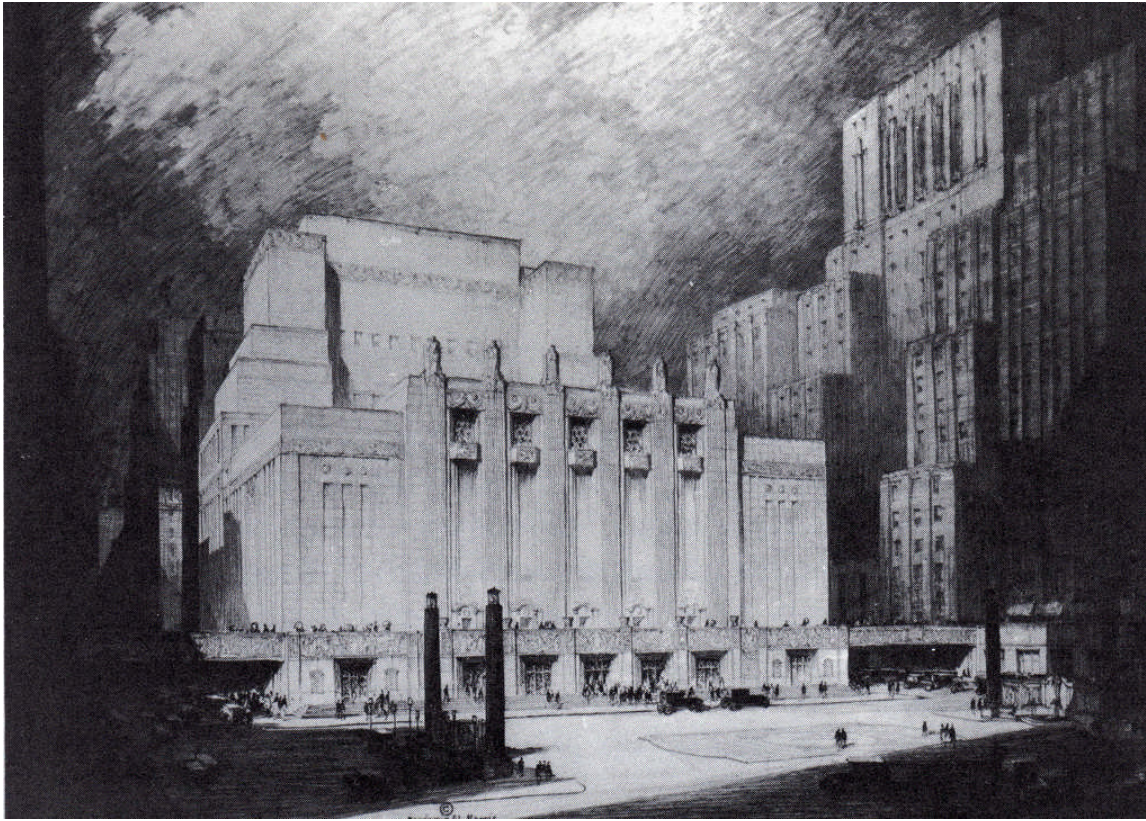
Above: caption: "the site in summer 1931, before the construction of Rockefeller Center"

Left: caption: "Sixth Avenue at 48th Street"



The Opera House

However unfortunate was the change in the neighborhood's character, there was a silver lining. Most of the leases on the property were due to run out between 1928 and the end of the decade. With the stock market reaching new highs every day and NYC in the midst of an unprecedented building boom, Columbia envisioned a bonanza from the redevelopment of its midtown property. At the center of these plans was the *Metropolitan Opera*, housed since 1883 in what was called "the yellow brewery" - an ugly brick structure occupying the block bounded by *Broadway, Seventh Avenue* and *39th* and *40th Street/s*. Prodded by its most powerful board member; *Otto Kahn*, a partner in the prestigious *Kuhn, Loeb* investment bank, the opera was considering building a more glamorous facility in a more fashionable neighborhood. In January 1926, Kahn presented the opera's board of directors with a memorandum that outlined a plan to finance the move. With the economic boom showing no sign of abating, Kahn estimated that the opera could sell its old property for \$12 million and that a new house would cost \$8.5 million to build, leaving \$3.5 million for the purchase of land. In addition, Kahn proposed to combine the opera house with a large office building whose rents would help subsidize the company's operating costs. He secured a site on *West 57th Street*, and the opera board hired the prominent architect *Benjamin Wister Morris* and the designer *Joseph Urban* to develop plans. They produced a striking opera house and office building in a dazzling French Art Deco style. But the *West 57th Street* location soon proved to be too cramped for an even more ambitious project.



***John Tonnele*, a vice president of the respected real estate firm of *William A. White & Company*, got wind of the opera's plan to move to more elegant quarters. His company was Columbia's advisor on the development of its *Upper Estate* and an opera house immediately struck him as the ideal magnet to attract upscale tenants to the property. Inspired by the prospects of the expanded site, Morris sketched a grand structure fronting a plaza (left). Surrounding the opera house the architect envisioned seven other buildings; hotels, apartment houses and department stores - all linked by a promenade and set amid gardens and fountains (right). The prototype of what was to become *Rockefeller Center* was born.**

Most Valuable Shopping District in the World

To generate interest in the project, on May 21st 1928, Kahn and the other *Metropolitan Opera* directors hosted a dinner at the *Metropolitan Club* on *Fifth Avenue*. They invited some of the city's richest men, including *John D. Rockefeller Jr.*, son of the founder of *Standard Oil*. He was not able to attend, but *Ivy Lee*, the public relations genius who worked for him, did attend. Four days after the dinner, Lee sent Rockefeller a memo noting that, with the opera house as its focal point, the *Upper Estate* site could become: “the most valuable shopping district in the world.”

“The plan commended itself to me as a highly important civic improvement.”

John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

RE: initially, Rockefeller expressed interest only in joining a large syndicate which would take over the leases of the *Upper Estate* for 99 years. When the idea of such a syndicate failed to attract backers, Rockefeller began thinking of taking on the entire project alone. In his typical methodical manner, he consulted separately five of NYC’s top real estate specialists and asked them, if he did assume the leases, how much he could expect to realize on subleases to those who would erect their own buildings on the site. The estimates ranged from slightly more than \$3 million to more than \$5 million a year. All five, Rockefeller later noted, considered the project: “a sound one and good business.” Also taken into consideration was the fact that the Rockefellers lived on *West 54th Street*, just north of the Columbia property. To Rockefeller, a strong supporter of *Prohibition* and a Sunday School teacher, the opportunity to eliminate saloons and houses of prostitution in his own neighborhood was irresistible.

Rockefeller quickly opened his own negotiations with Columbia. By the summer of 1928, he had reached an agreement giving him the right to buy part of the *Upper Estate* for \$6 million and to lease the rest for twenty-one years at \$3.3 million per year. He also received the option of three renewals of twenty-one years each. An appraisal valued the property at \$62 million. The Rockefellers had the habit of seeking out the best advice on any subject and heeding it. Thus, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.* turned to *John R. Todd*, the attorney who headed the *Todd & Brown* engineering firm. He was a man who understood the complexities of urban construction and of matching the right client to a property. Todd brought in *L. Andrew Reinhard* and *Henry Hofmeister*, the first architects of the team that actually designed *Rockefeller Center*. Hofmeister specialized in ventilation, plumbing, and the arrangement of interiors while Reinhard was both a designer and a craftsman. Working over the summer, by September 1928 they produced proposals that became known in the history of Rockefeller Center as “The Labor Day Plans.” The mix of structures included office towers, a 37-story hotel, and a 35-story apartment building. In the autumn of 1928, lawyers crafted the formal agreement and on January 22nd 1929, the longtime president of *Columbia University*, *Nicholas Murray Butler*, publicly announced the details. The *New York Times* reported that the complex, with its open plaza, exclusive shops and cafes was reminiscent of Paris’s *Place de l’Opera*. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. wrote later that he never for a moment thought that he would be responsible for any construction. Others, he believed, “*would develop and finance their own building programs as the opera proposed to do.*”

The Associated Architects

With the agreement in place, the pace of the project picked up. Rockefeller, with the advice of the eminent architects *John Russell Pope* and *William T. Aldrich*, invited several other leading architects to submit designs by May 1929 - designs that all who signed subleases would have to follow in erecting their buildings. Two of the architects chosen; *Raymond M. Hood* and *Wallace K. Harrison*, had a profound influence in shaping *Rockefeller Center*. Hood, a *Rhode Island* native educated at *Brown University*, was first among equals. Hood had studied at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in *Paris* and had worked in the office of America's leading practitioners of the *Gothic Revival* style; *Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson*. In 1922, he won the competition to design the new *Chicago Tribune* headquarters. Raymond Hood's mastery of Gothic design strongly appealed to Rockefeller being the family's usual choice for public commissions. *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.* was deeply involved in the construction of the *French Gothic* inspired *Riverside Cathedral*, the family's own church. Gothic was Rockefeller's first choice for the new project. Though he was ultimately overruled, the parapet outside his 56th-floor office window - the one architectural detail he would see when he looked up from his desk, was, indeed, *Gothic Revival*.



***Wallace K. Harrison*, a 35yo Massachusetts native, had also studied at the prestigious *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*. He had worked for *McKim, Mead & White* and was the junior partner of noted architect *Harvey Wiley Corbett* at the time. Harrison had two important advantages over the other architects working on the project; he had worked for *Raymond Hood* and thus was close to the master architect of the Center and he was married to the sister-in-law of *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.*'s only daughter. Harrison, along with his partner *Max Abramovitz*, designed the trademark *Trylon and Perisphere* at the 1939/40 *New York World's Fair*. In later years, he would design the opera house at NYC's *Lincoln Center*. By October 1929, the preliminary drawings for the project had been finished. *Benjamin Wister Morris* was the architect of the opera house and the other architects: Reinhard, Hofmeister, Corbett, Harrison and Hood had charge of all the other structures. With fourteen major buildings, Rockefeller Center was the largest private development the world had ever seen. Not only did the immense scale of the project give some of the participants reason for concern, getting control of the leases on the old *Upper Estate* had taken longer than expected and not a single sublease had been signed. On October 29th 1929, the stock market crashed. In its wake, plans for the Upper Estate would be completely transformed.**



Above: caption: “Associated Architects and developers playing with miniature Rockefeller Centers. Standing from left: J.O. Brown, Webster Todd, Henry Hofmeister, Hugh S. Robertson. Seated from left: Harvey Wiley Corbett, Raymond Hood, John R. Todd, Andrew Reinhard, Dr. J. M. Todd.”

Going it Alone

“The general financial situation was so steadily getting worse that there was no possibility of subletting unimproved, as contemplated, any portion of the area. There were only two courses open to me. One, to abandon the entire development. The other, to go forward with it in the definite knowledge that I myself would have to build and finance it alone.”

John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

RE: Rockefeller was determined to proceed. In reality, he had little choice. The first casualty was the opera house. With its old property plunging in value and Otto Kahn’s health failing, there was no chance the opera company could raise the funds for a new house. What the opera left behind for the planners was both the vision of focusing the project on a central imposing edifice and the concept of an open plaza. Instead of being driven by the need for a hall for performances of *Rigoletto*, the enterprise would become a pure business venture. In the words of one of its managers, it would be: *“a commercial center as beautiful as possible consistent with the maximum income that could be developed.”*

Altruism and Hard Cash



“...This group of buildings in which are focused the vital activities of a big segment of U.S. industrial power began as an effort of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to provide a site for a New York opera house. When the opera project flopped and Mr. Rockefeller found himself with a long, \$3,000,000-a-year lease on twelve acres of Manhattan land, he proceeded to apply the bold imagination, well-meant altruism and hard-cash practicality which have been the earmarks of Rockefeller enterprise...”

Life magazine, January 12th 1942

Left: J.D. Rockefeller, Jr.

The Last Five Percent



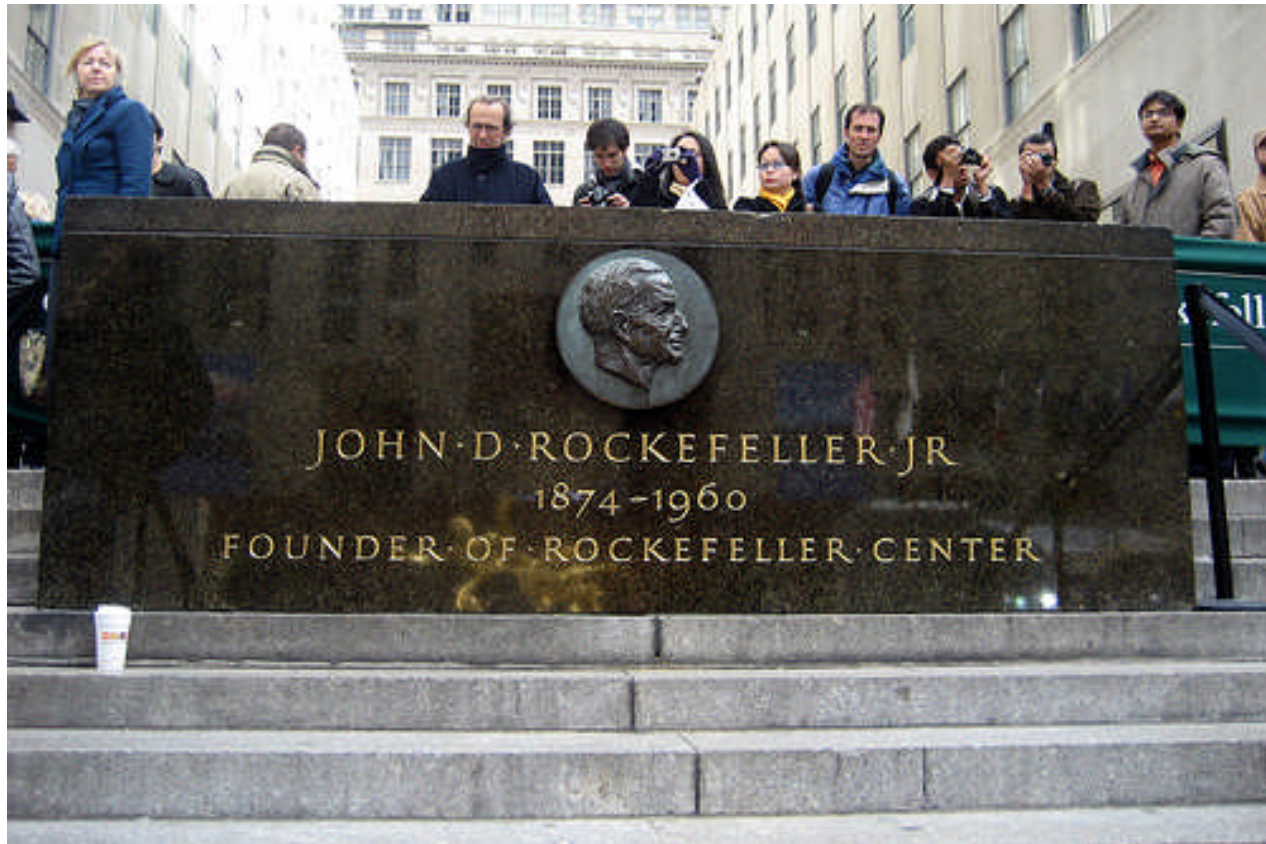
Because of *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.*, the *Rockefeller Center* complex was sound and creditable. It was only due to the fact that he had consented to be personally responsible for repayment that the *Metropolitan Life Insurance Company* agreed to lend the enterprise \$65 million at five percent interest. It was Rockefeller who, in the darkest days of the *Great Depression*, kept things going by selling *Standard Oil* stock, which had been valued at \$80 a share a decade earlier, for \$2 a share to pay construction expenses. Most significantly, it was Rockefeller who insisted on “the last five percent.” That was, spending one-twentieth extra (5%) to get top quality.

Above: November 1st 1939, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.* drives what was “the last rivet” to complete the steel skeleton of the *United States Rubber Company Building*, proclaimed the final structure of *Rockefeller Center*.

I Believe

- I believe in the supreme worth of the individual and in his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;
- I believe that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty;
- I believe that the law was made for man and not man for the law; that government is the servant of the people and not their master;
- I believe in the dignity of labor, whether with head or hand; that the world owes no man a living but that it owes every man an opportunity to make a living;
- I believe that thrift is essential to well ordered living and that economy is a prime requisite of a sound financial structure, whether in government, business or personal affairs;
- I believe that truth and justice are fundamental to an enduring social order;
- I believe in the sacredness of a promise, that a man's word should be as good as his bond; that character not wealth or power or position – is of supreme worth;
- I believe that the rendering of useful service is the common duty of mankind and that only in the purifying fire of sacrifice is the dross of selfishness consumed and the greatness of the human soul set free;
- I believe in an all-wise and all-loving God, named by whatever name, and that the individuals highest fulfillment, greatest happiness, and widest usefulness are to be found in living in harmony with His Will;
- I believe that love is the greatest thing in the world; that it alone can overcome hate; that right can and will triumph over might.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr.



Part 3

The Architecture of Optimism



In 1930, bulldozers began clearing the site upon which would rise the structures designed by the team of thirty architects and one-hundred and twenty craftsmen working in the *Graybar Building* (next to *Grand Central Terminal*). The troublesome question of what would replace the opera house as the focus of the complex had not yet been resolved. The answer would come from an unexpected source. *Raymond Hood* had been remodeling space on *Fifth Avenue* for new studios and offices for the *National Broadcasting Company* (NBC), where Chairman *David Sarnoff* was pushing the idea that radio could be entertainment for the entire family as well as an important advertising medium. Sarnoff wanted to construct large soundproof auditoriums and recording studios. The *Rockefeller Center* project looked like the perfect fit for NBC's parent company; the *Radio Corporation of America* (RCA). With its two networks and its *Radio-Keith-Orpheum* (RKO) movie and theater operations, RCA was desperate not only for the facilities Sarnoff wanted but for prime office space and two theaters. For that, RCA was willing to pay more than \$4.25 million per year in rent. In the spring of 1930 the new focus of the project became the *RCA Building*.

Left: caption: "NYC - Rockefeller Center: International Building - To Commemorate the Workmen of the Center - Demolition"



"That same month, Reinhard & Hofmeister drew up Todd's new conception of the project, a design intended to lure the prospective tenant by offering him an irresistibly prominent office building. The scenographic sequence of the pedestrian promenade and public plaza, once intended to honor the lyric arts, now culminated in a fifty-story office building dedicated to the more popular arts purveyed by RCA. Department stores flanked it, private streets giving them four full exposures. Four thirty-story office buildings were located on the north and south blocks, two of them flanking the plaza, the others on Sixth Avenue. A nine-story loft building faced St. Patrick's Cathedral, and twin nine-story buildings framed by promenade..."

Robert A.M. Stern

RE: when the *Metropolitan Square* (a.k.a. "G-3") plan was presented in January 1930, the former opera house had been replaced by a seventy-story office building; the future *RCA Building*. In December 1929, Rockefeller found new tenants for the revised G-3 plan. He talked with *General Electric* (GE) and RCA and its affiliates; NBC and RKO. Negotiations began in February 1930.



“We didn’t want men who were too much committed to the architectural past or who were too much interested in wild modernism...good plans for what we had to have and then to clothe those plans, as simply and attractively as possible, with clean-looking exteriors.”

John R. Todd



Top Left: caption: “30 Rockefeller Plaza entrance: Radio”

Top Right: caption: “30 Rockefeller Plaza entrance: Television

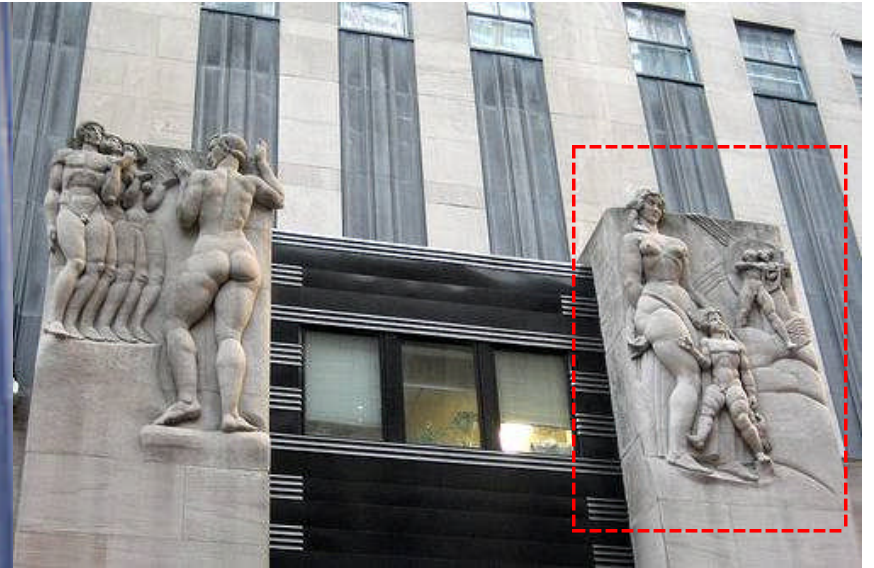
Left: *David Sarnoff*, Chairman of the Board – *Radio Corporation of America* (in his executive office in the *RCA Building* (30 Rockefeller Plaza, a.k.a. “30 Rock”))



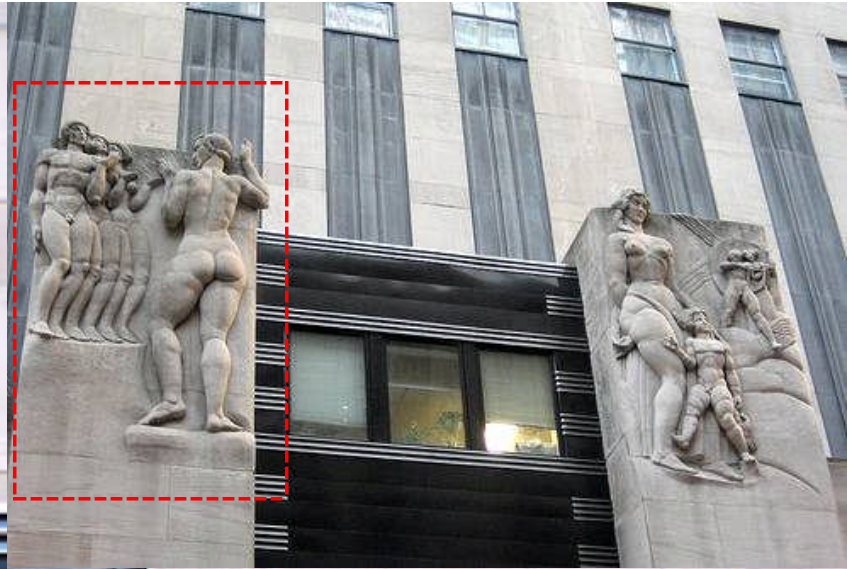
Left: entitled: “Transmission Receiving Music and Flashing It Through the Ether by Means of Radio to Reception,” by sculptor Leo Friedlander (1933)







Left: entitled: “Transmission Receiving an Image of Dancers and Flashing it Through the Ether by Means of Television to Reception, Symbolized by Mother Earth and Her Child,” by Leo Friedlander (1933). J.D. Rockefeller, Jr. found this work to be “gross and unbeautiful.” The public and most critics agreed.





Above: caption: “Spirit of Energy sending out Radio and Television”

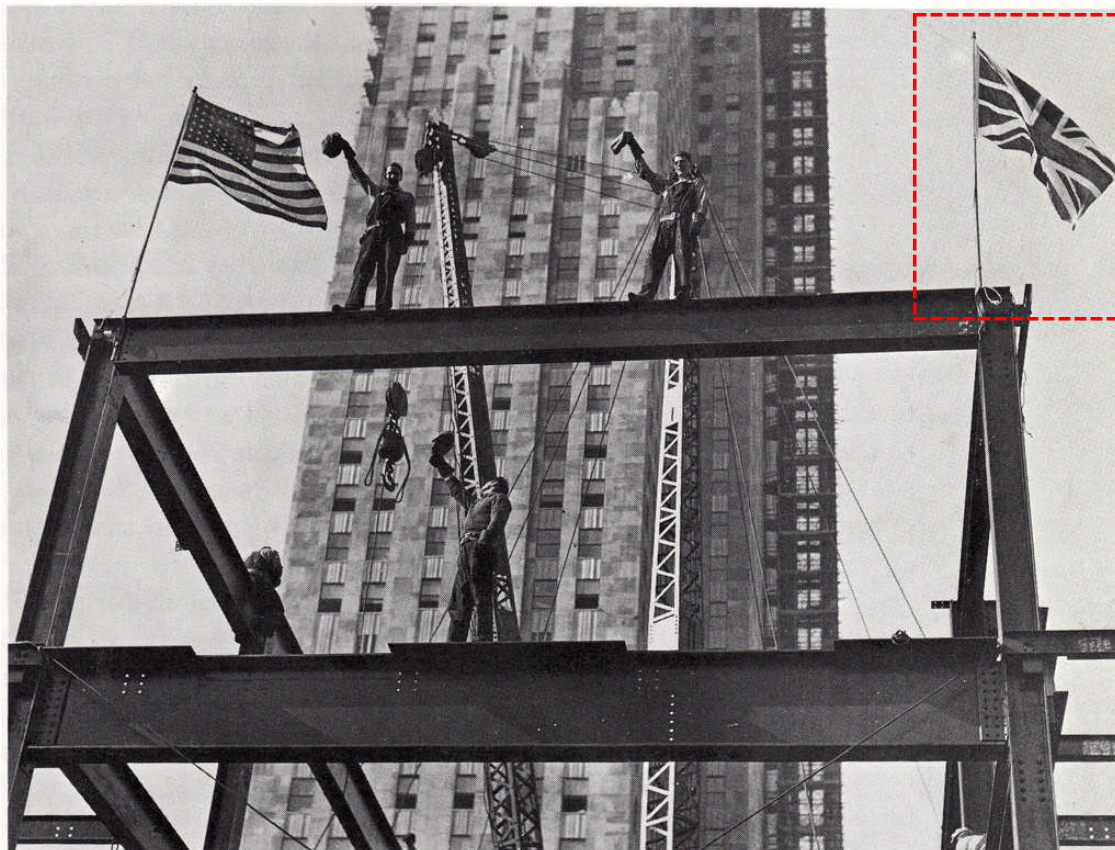
The Channel Gardens

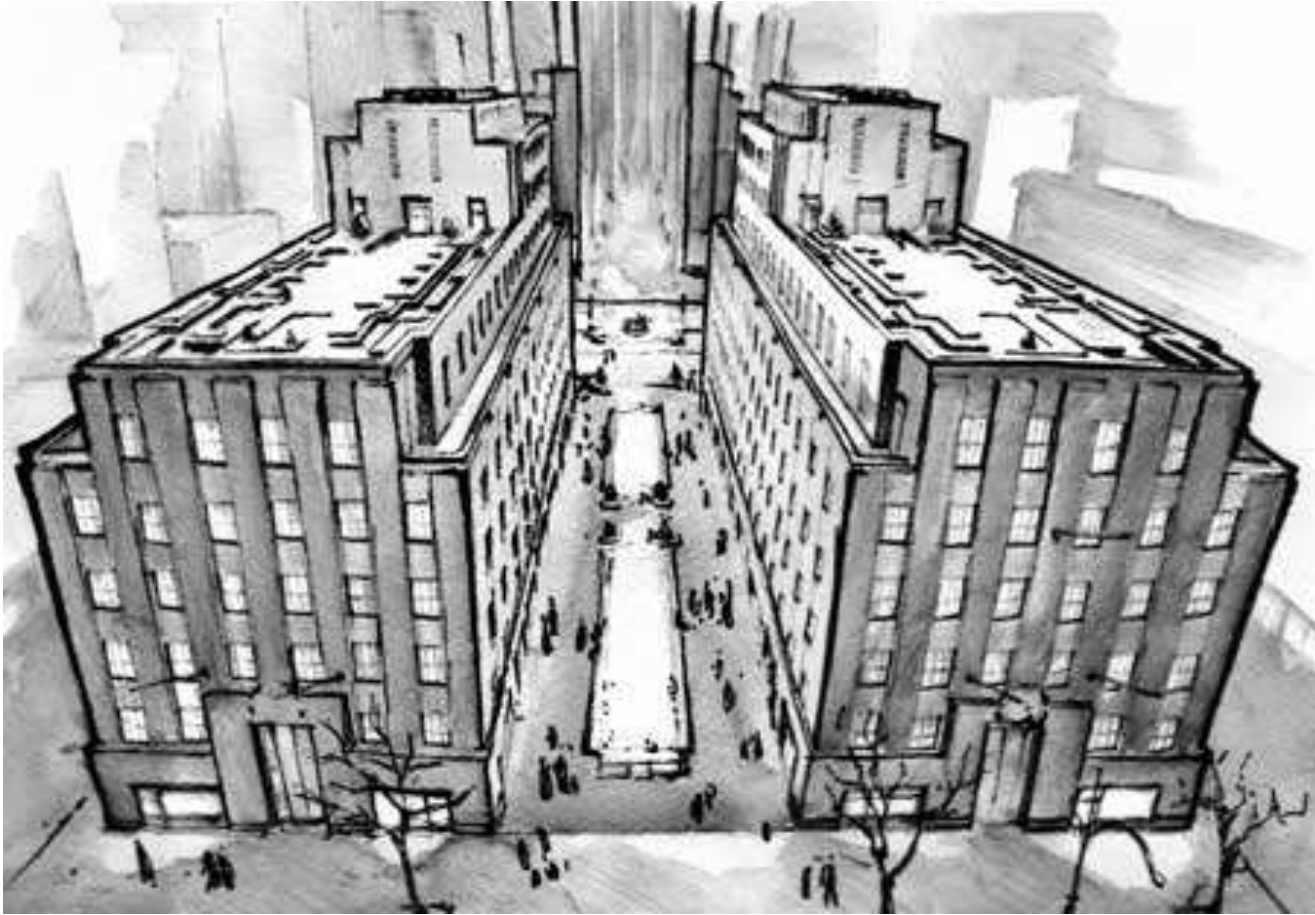


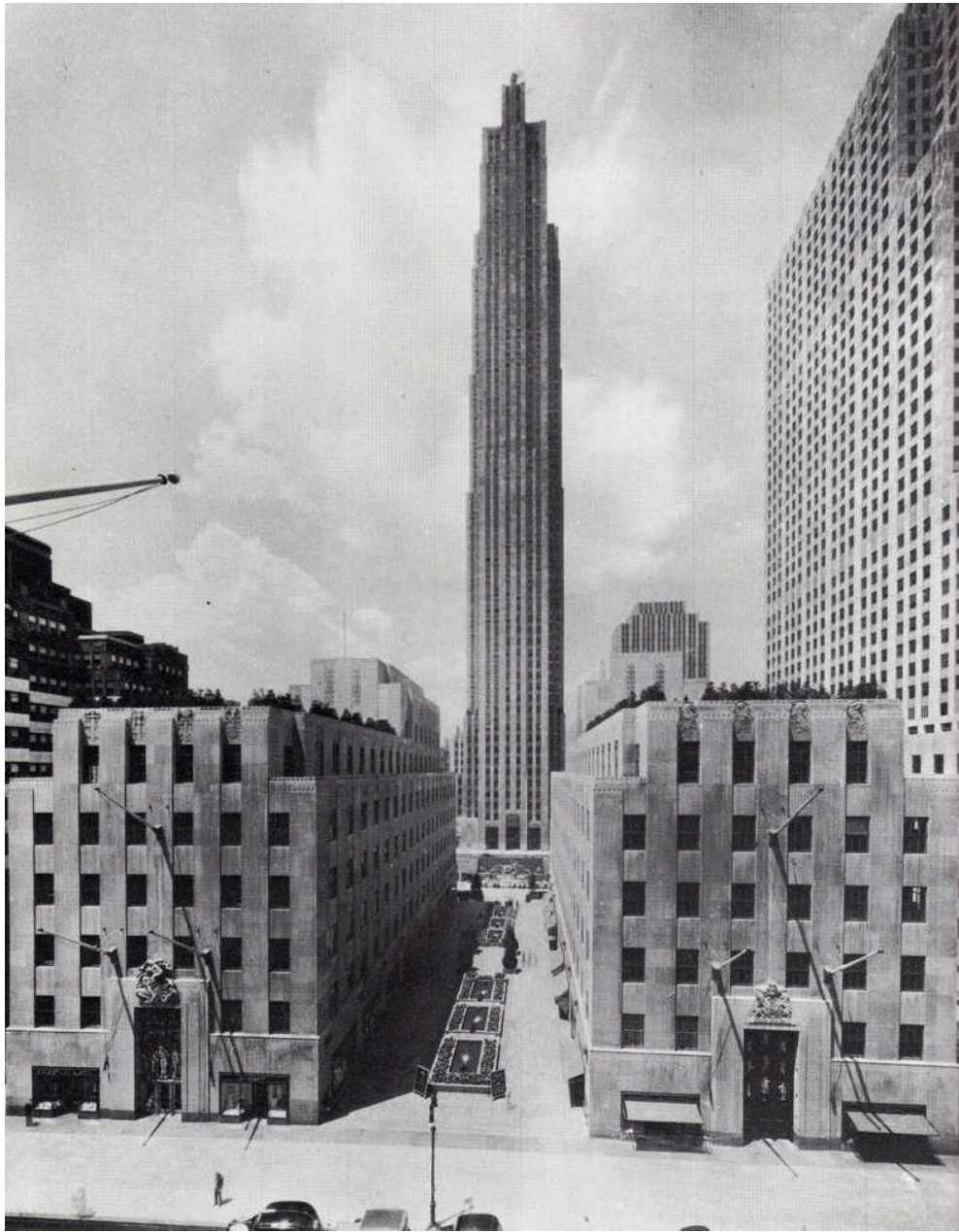
THE PROMENADE AND PLAZA ROCKEFELLER CENTER

The *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* taught alumni *Raymond Hood* and *Wallace Harrison* that the first principle in effective urban planning was the axial plan; a street, boulevard, walkway etc. flanked by harmonious structures that led to a well defined focal point. Thus, pedestrians are drawn along the thoroughfare, animating the scene and contributing to the pleasure of city life. *Paris* was filled with such contrivances; preeminently the *Champs Elysees* moving up to the *Arc de Triomphe*. The decision to place the comparatively low *British Empire* and *La Maison Francaise Building/s* at *Fifth Avenue* on either side of the downward-sloping *Promenade* (dubbed by journalists the “*Channel Gardens*”) leading to the upswept bulk of the *RCA Building*, is classic *Beaux Arts* planning and the closest approximation in NYC to a Parisian boulevard.

Left: the *Channel Gardens* (*Promenade*) separating the low-rise *British* and *French* buildings; just as 118 the *English Channel* separates the two countries













The *Channel Gardens Promenade*; from *Fifth Avenue* leading down to the sunken (lower) plaza, is perhaps one of NYC's finest public spaces (despite its relatively small size). Animated fountainheads sculpted by French Sculptor *Rene Paul Chambellan* (famous for his Art Deco frieze at the base of the *Chanin Building* on *East 42nd Street* – near *Grand Central Terminal*) is surrounded by benches and lush landscaping that is changed seasonally. The flagstone promenade is lined with uniform retail frontages in harmony with the verticality of the seventy-story tower it leads to.







Six three-foot high, cast-bronze fountainhead sculptures gushing broad streams of water grace the greenery and east-end/s of the *Channel Gardens*' six pools. The large female fountainheads are of the gentle mermaids *Nereids* – mythological daughters of the benevolent sea-god *Nereus*. The male figures are *Tritons*, attendants of the sea-gods. Sitting aside fanciful fish, Chambellan's sculptures are, from *Fifth Avenue* to the lower plaza: *Leadership, Will, Thought, Imagination, Energy* and *Alertness*.









The seventy-story tower soars over the *Channel Gardens* majestically. Despite its bulk, the width of the tower is proportionally small thus, the visual impact is heightened by the fact that the gardens slope gently downward toward the sunken plaza and its formal forest of national flags (above). The flags not only add color to the grey limestone of the RC complex, but also add movement and an international ambience.

This Is Our War



The *Office of War Information* (OWI) was created in 1942 to provide information about the world war raging around the globe to the public at home and abroad. One of an on-going series of exhibitions displayed in Rockefeller Center's Promenade (above and left) in March 1943 was the exhibit entitled: "This is Our War." It focused on the "United Nations" - the twenty-eight countries and governments in exile who first signed onto Churchill's *Atlantic Charter*, which articulated the Allied principles for fighting the war against fascism.



Top L&R: the exhibit incorporated representations of FDR's famous "Four Freedoms" speech. Freedom of speech/worship and freedom from want/fear were embodied by four allegorical "golden sword" statues: a dog, a snake, a dragon and a pair of unbound hands.

Left: between the photographic displays was the *Atlantic Charter*. Speakers at each end broadcast the voices of Roosevelt, Churchill and Chiang Kai-Shek every half-hour

The Nature of the Enemy



“The fanatical scream, ‘Hell Hitler!’ ripped through the air in Rockefeller Center. It took startled crowds some time to realize that the cry and the bark of Hitler's voice came from some captured German sound films. For ‘The Nature of The Enemy,’ the OWI ringed the skating rink with massive photomurals showing Hitler, bombed out refugees, crying Chinese peasants, and flaming battleships. If you bought a war bond, you could sign a bomb that’d get dropped on Berlin. Along the Promenade, a half dozen dioramas were, like the giant banners running the length of the buildings, just depicting the facts, ma’am: ‘THE ENEMY PLANS THIS FOR YOU.’ ‘Desecration of Religion,’ Militarization of Children,’ ‘Concentration Camps,’ etc., etc.”

The New York Times, June 1943



The Sunken (Lower) Plaza

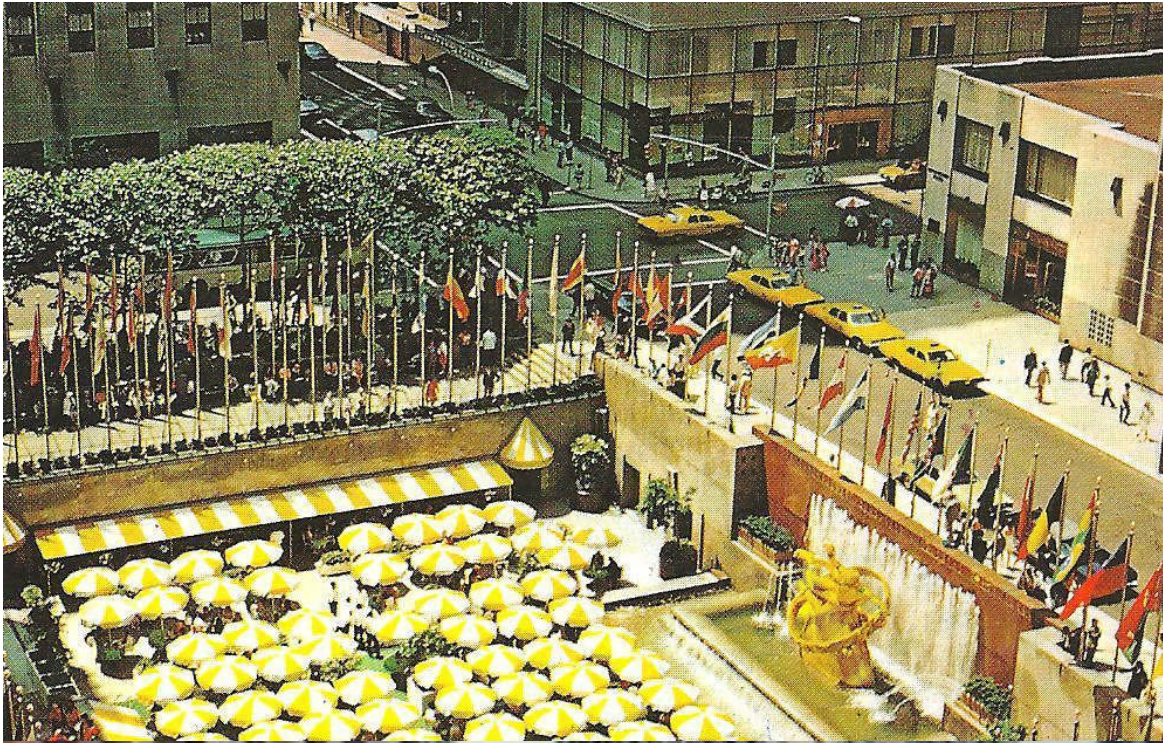


The sunken or lower plaza in front of the *RCA Building* initially served as nothing more than an entrance to the underground concourse, but it proved problematic. Pedestrians shunned it and the shops that opened there nearly all failed. When restaurants replaced the shops, diners had little to look at in the static open space. On a visit to the Rockefellers' hometown of *Cleveland*, *J.D. Rockefeller, Jr.* heard that a local inventor; *M.C. Carpenter*, had perfected a system for making artificial ice for outdoor rinks. Desperate to try anything to bring life to the boring lower plaza, on *Christmas Day 1936*, Rockefeller Center's managers set up a temporary ice skating rink. It was an immediate success becoming one of RC's most beloved attractions.

Left: the lower plaza (ca. 1934)

Right: the lower plaza (ca.1936)





Subway

47-50 Streets
Rockefeller Center Station

B D F V

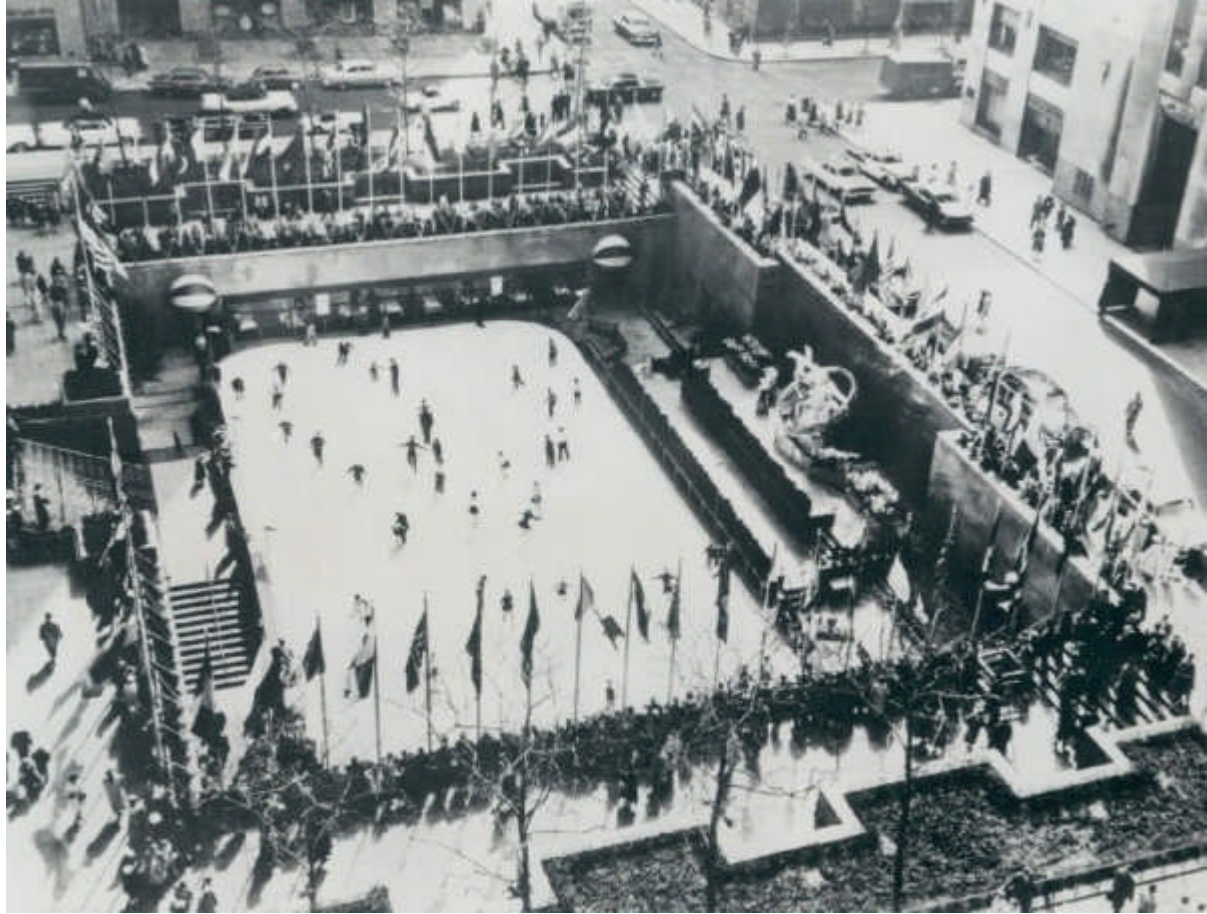
 New York City Transit

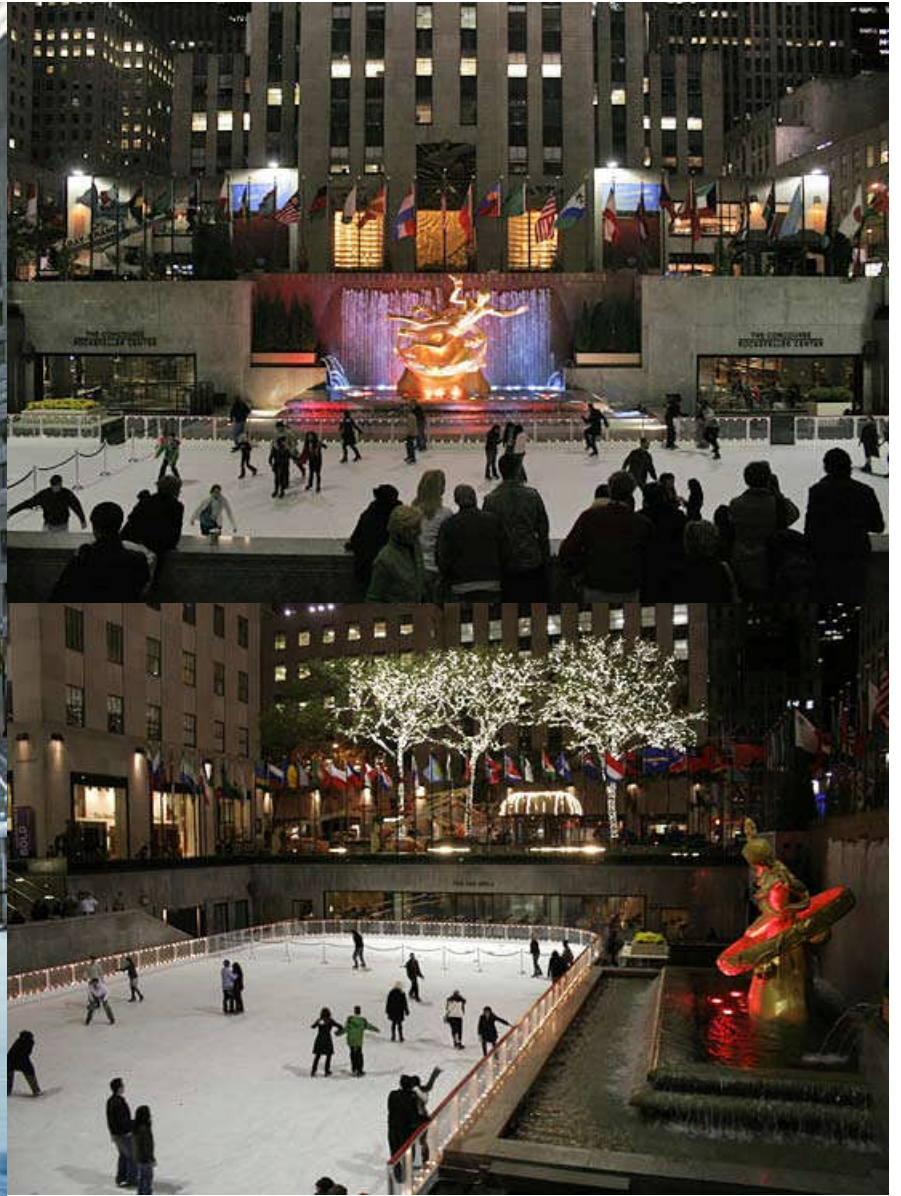
Although the sunken plaza was planned to attract visitors to the center's extensive underground concourse, two large restaurants flanked its north and south side/s. The sunken plaza was/is used as an outdoor cafe when the skating rink is not in use. The concourse is also tied-in to the NYC Subway system.





Above & Left; the lower plaza transformed into an ice skating rink in winter









“Rockefeller Center did not seem at all impersonal. It had pleasant cafes in it, and flower beds, and tucked-away roof gardens for the solace of upper-floor office workers, and a sunken plaza they turned into a skating rink in winter...Altogether it was, though undeniably tremendous, a very welcoming, populist sort of development.”

Jan Morris, Author



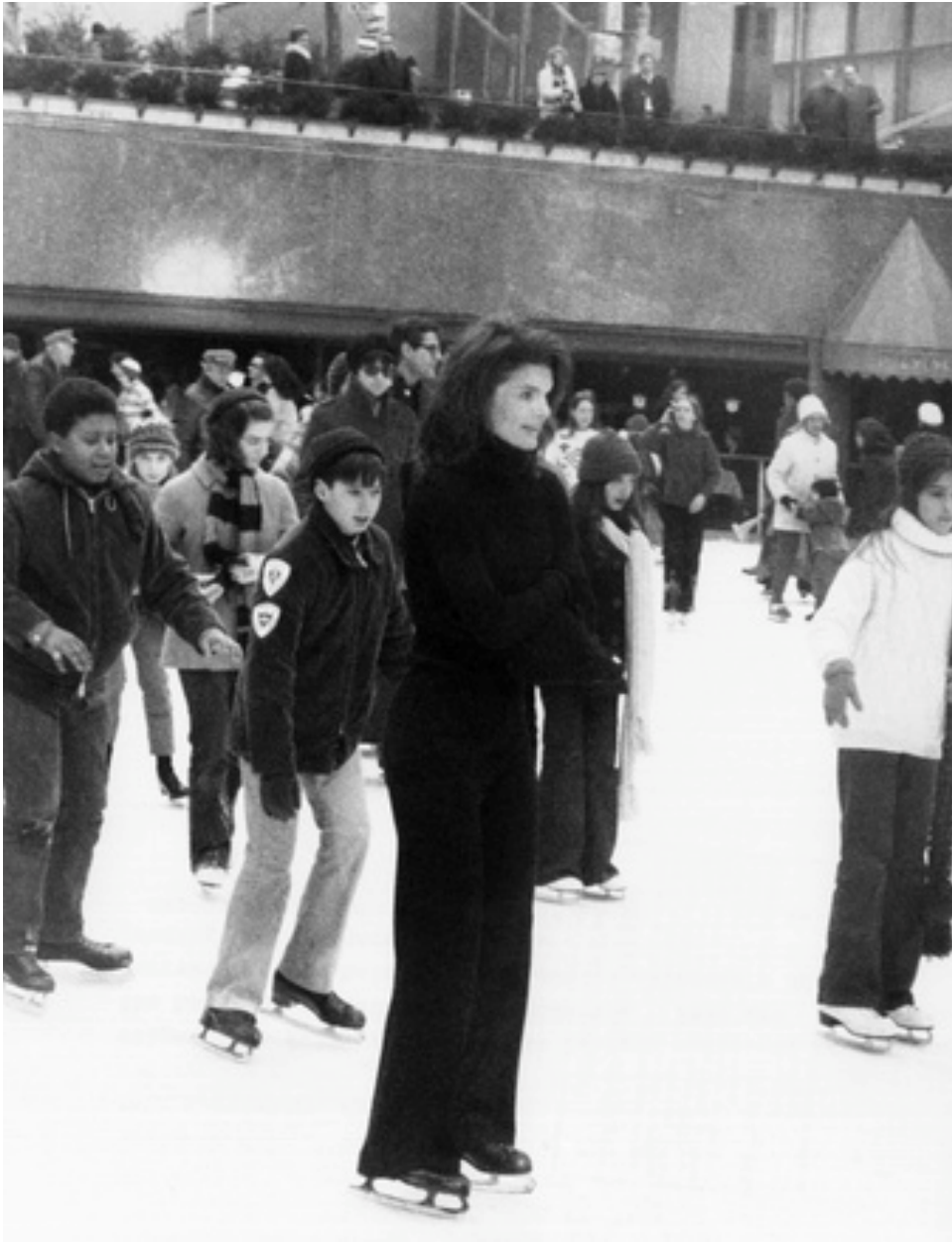
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Join us for Coca-Cola in the heart of New York City... where the fun of introducing folks away from October 16, 1929.

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Yes... you know Coca-Cola had to be good to get where it is. • Over 58 million times each day, in more than 100 countries, people everywhere enjoy the special good taste, the welcome lift, which Coke provides. • *Have a Coke*... so good in taste, in such good taste... always.







A Means to Mighty Ends

“The finished figure had the stylized hair and blank expression of ancient Greek sculpture that was Manship’s trademark. But it also had Manship’s typical emphasis on lithe movement. Installed in early 1934, the eight-ton bronze sculpture had Prometheus flying almost horizontally, with a clump of fire in his right hand, through streams of water over a zodiacal ring. Edward Alden Jewel, writing in The New York Times, called Prometheus ‘a genuine masterpiece, beautiful in its rhythm.’ But he acknowledged that another critic, the actor and writer Frank Craven, considered it ‘a boudoir knicknack.’ Manship’s unhindered success inspired detractors who saw in him an upper-class toady irrelevant to the dead-serious modernism of the 1930’s...Manship had many reservations about the completed work. He thought he had been hurried by the twelve-month schedule, and the horizontal figure of Prometheus was not consonant with the verticality of 30 Rockefeller Plaza.”

Christopher Gray, Author





The best known sculpture in RC (and the most photographed monumental sculpture in all of NYC), *Prometheus* has become the main attraction of the Lower Plaza. It was created by the famed American sculptor *Paul Manship*. Manship had a great fascination for mythological subjects and events. Carved into the red granite wall behind the statue, the central theme of the work is stated in a quote taken from the sixth century B.C. Greek dramatist *Aeschylus*: “*Prometheus, Teacher in Every Art, Brought the Fire That Hath Proved to Mortals a Means to Mighty Ends*”











R.C.A. BUILDING, ROCKEFELLER CENTER AT NIGHT, NEW YORK CITY



Maiden and Youth



Paul Manship also created two, eight-foot high cast-bronze sculptures entitled: “Maiden and Youth” (L&R respectively) in 1933. Originally gilded (like *Prometheus*), they stood on granite shelves flanking Prometheus. Manship was dissatisfied with the arrangement thus he had the figures placed elsewhere. Until 1983, they were stored on the roof garden of the *British Empire Building*. That year, they were restored and given a traditional brown patina. They were first moved to the skating rink, but in 2001 they were moved to their current location; near the staircase leading to Prometheus.









Christmas in Manhattan



“On Christmas Eve the city glowed...In Rockefeller Center the 65-foot tree from the White Mountains bathed the area all about it with a wondrous glow, and the path to it was lined with tributary trees, cone-shaped and man-made that bloomed in pale green with inner lighting.”

The New York Times, December 25th 1957

RE: construction workers erected a twenty-foot-tall tree marking the unofficial start of the beloved tradition (above). The first official *Christmas* celebration at *Rockefeller Center* was led by *Nelson Rockefeller* in 1933, after the completion of the plaza featuring a fifty-foot tree (left)



Finding the right tree each year involves scouting the surrounding states for eligible evergreens with owners who are willing to part with them. Bringing the tree into busy *midtown-Manhattan* isn't easy, requiring a custom-made trailer and crane to transport the roughly 10-ton conifer through the crowded and narrow city streets. The largest tree on record - a 100-foot *Norway Spruce* from *Killingworth, CT*, was selected for the millennium celebrations in 1999. Since then, most have averaged approximately 70-feet tall. About 30K LED lights and a nine-and-a-half foot *Swarovski* star (upper left) has capped each tree since the 2004 holiday season.





Due to its axial setting; in front of *30 Rockefeller Plaza* and directly above the statue of *Prometheus* in the sunken plaza and perpendicular to the *Promenade*, the annual lighting of the communal Christmas tree has become a beloved NYC tradition.



Above: dubbed the “blizzardopolis” of 1947, the day-after-Christmas storm dropped more than two-feet of fresh powder on New York City’s streets; the city’s largest snowfall on record for almost sixty years. Despite the winter weather, the tree’s lights still shone brightly for the ultimate “White Christmas.”



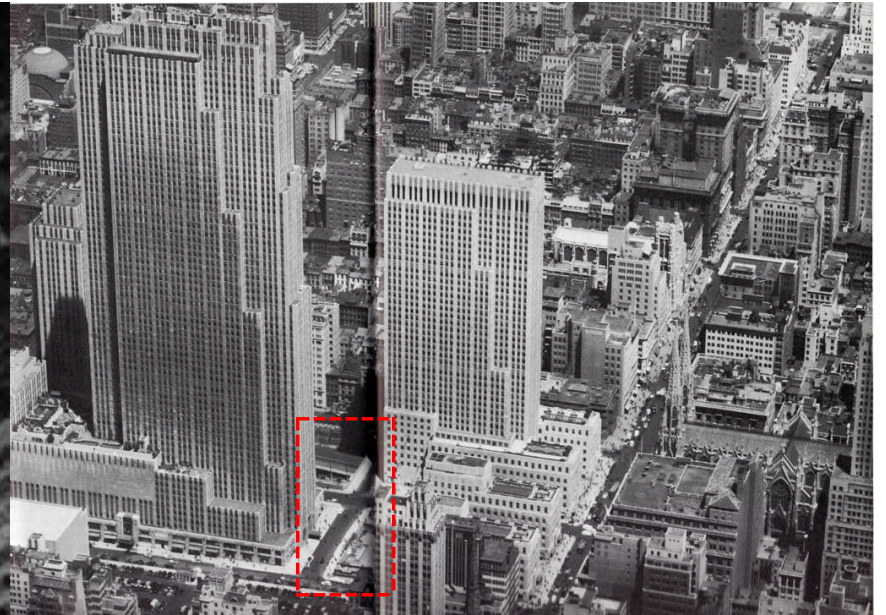


The RC Christmas tree lighting ceremony was aired on television for the first time in 1951 during “The Kate Smith Evening Hour.” The 1964 RC Christmas tree was installed with a then-record 7K lights and six miles of electrical wiring.



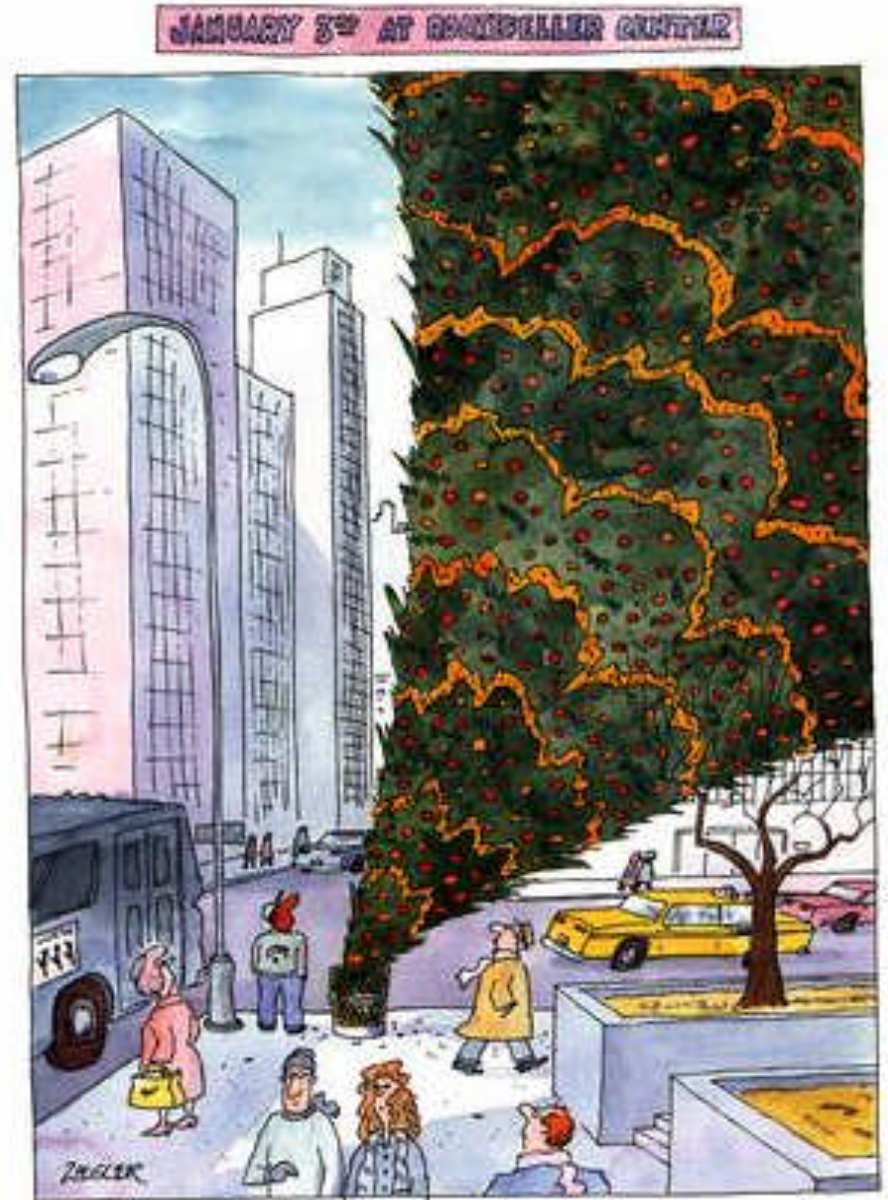
During the winter, the Channel Gardens fountains are turned off and RC is decorated for the Christmas holidays. For many years, the decorations varied. In 1954, artist *Valerie Clarebout* introduced twelve wire-sculpture angels which, a few years later, became permanent fixtures at Christmastime. Each eight-foot high figure holds a six-foot long brass trumpet and, like the wire snowflakes (bottom), glitter from thousands of tiny lights.



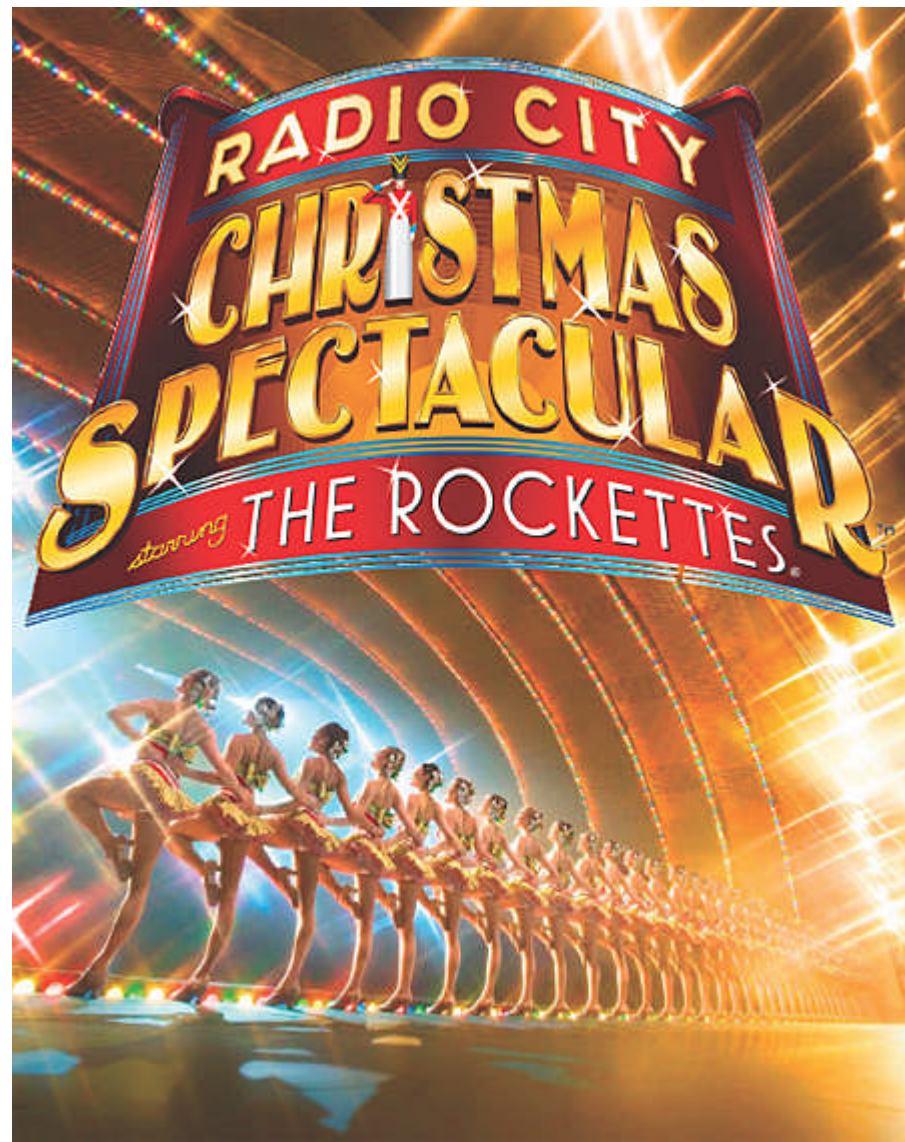


The three-block long, private, north-south street that *Rockefeller Center* created (between 30 Rock and the sunken plaza), makes RC the world's most popular hearth at Christmas-time.









THE MUSIC HALL'S GREAT EASTER SHOW



RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Rockefeller Center
Plaza 7-3100
SHOWPLACE OF THE NATION

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THE NUMBER ONE PICTURE
OF THE YEAR!

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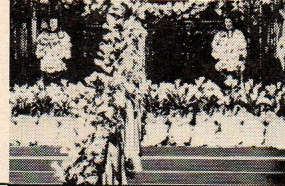
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DOORS OPEN SUNDAY 11:00 A.M.

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ON THE GREAT STAGE **Glory of Easter**

Celebrated Cathedral Pageant
with Choral Ensemble
Soloists,
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Potpouri '70-
with the Rockettes,
the Ballet Company
specialty acts
and guest artists.



SPECIAL PARKING FOR OUR PATRONS IS CONVENIENT AND REASONABLE AT ROCKEFELLER CENTER GARAGE 6: P.M. TO 12:30 A.M. (EXC. SAT.)...\$1.25

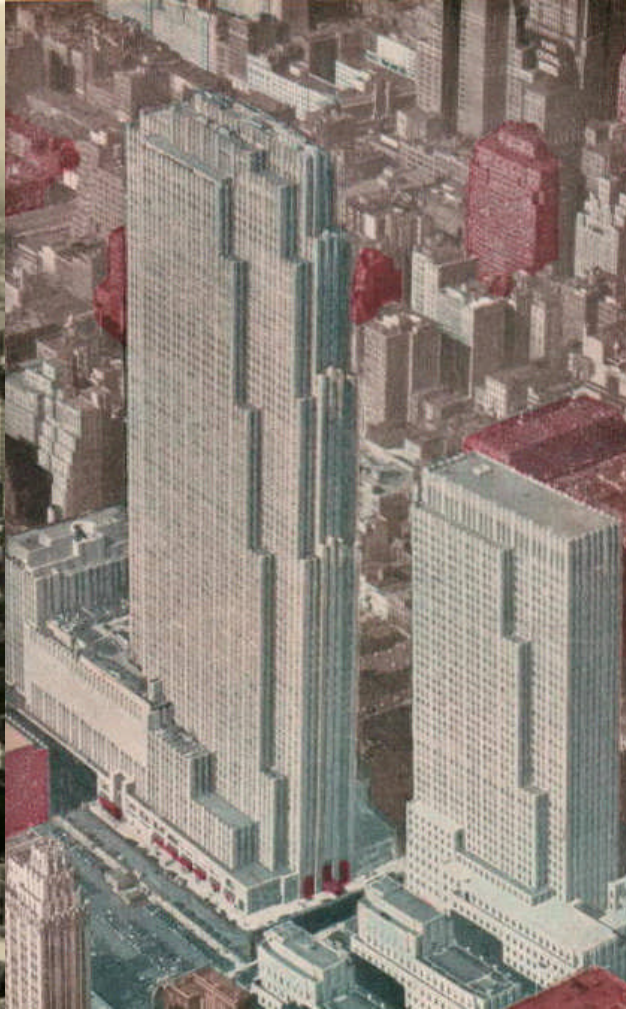


Left: artist Jeff Koons' botanical sculpture that was installed on the Christmas tree site in the spring and summer of 2000.

30 Rock



By 1930, *Raymond Hood* had shed his Gothic pedigree for the Art Deco style, proving his mastery of the form with the *Daily News Building* on *East 42nd Street*. The Deco style, which had had its unveiling at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in *Paris* in 1925, celebrated the modern world of industry and science. However, Hood's enthusiasm for "streamline moderne" was not shared by his very conservative client; *J.D. Rockefeller, Jr.* Rockefeller's wife *Abby Aldrich* and son *Nelson* were both collectors of modern art. In fact, Mrs. Rockefeller was an original founder of the *Museum of Modern Art* in NYC. They both favored modernity with all the force a wife and son could bring to bear on the family patriarch. In addition, *John R. Todd* recognized the economic benefits of constructing contemporary buildings. Art Deco fit the bill perfectly and had one additional advantage; it was an optimistic architecture, an architecture inspired by the belief that a better world was at hand through science and technology. It was committed to a bold modernity in its materials and shapes, ready to accept enhancement from the artist and sculptor's hand. *Progress* would become the theme of every aspect of RC including material selection. The seventy-story *RCA Building* celebrated modernity in its soaring height, cubist-like setbacks and declension of the elevator bank breakdown on its north and south facades (left).







Imperishable
BEAUTY
in Steel

NEW under the sun, here and there, from time to time, something is added to the resources of art and of industry. Such an event, in the realm of metals, has been accomplished. Steel, already the basic material for a host of practical uses, now takes its place as a medium for the creation of beauty.

The U S S STAINLESS Steels bring to both practical and aesthetic values a new permanence. These chromium and chromium-nickel alloys are available with a variety of finishes for the enrichment of architectural objects. The brilliant polish or the softer lustre given them when they are new will remain, unaffected by age or exposure. Likewise their wide range of compositions and properties makes them adaptable for numberless industrial, chemical, oil refining, manufacturing, food handling, agricultural, and domestic uses. They are capable of being forged, drawn, welded, or otherwise worked in obedience to the designer's will.

What properties do you require? Correspondence is invited by any of the subsidiary companies of the United States Steel Corporation named below.

In the Music Hall of Rockefeller Center, New York, the stairway and balcony railings are mainly of U S S 18-8 STAINLESS Steel, with which other materials are combined to give desired contrasts. The utilization of STAINLESS enhances the effect of other embellishments in this famed structure. Builders and Managers of Rockefeller Center—Tudor, Robinson, Todd, Engineering Corporation and Todd & Brown, Inc. Architects—Reichart & Helmerberg; Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray; Hood & Fossiboux. Mechanical Engineer—Clyde R. Place. All of New York.

U S S STAINLESS
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- AMERICAN SHEET AND TIN PLATE COMPANY, Pittsburgh, Sheets and Light Plates
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- Export Distributors—UNITED STATES STEEL PRODUCTS COMPANY Hudson Terminal Building, New York, N. Y.

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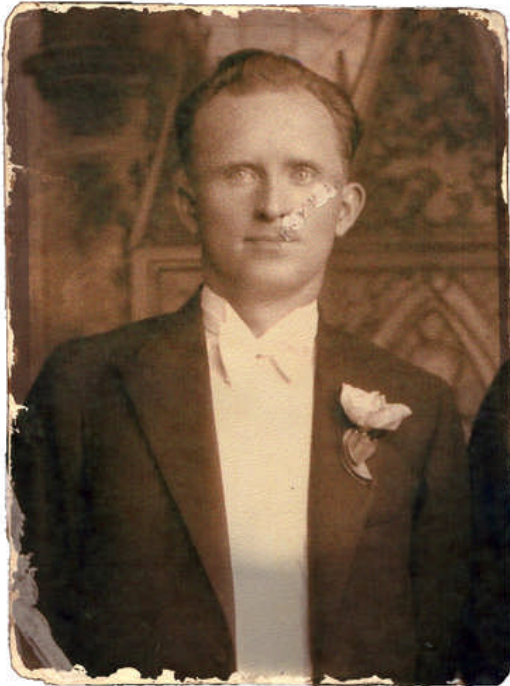


Men at Lunch



Taken on September 20th 1932 during the construction of *30 Rockefeller Plaza*, the well-known portrait (top) of eleven ironworkers, legs dangling 850-feet above terra firma, ran in the October 2nd 1932 Sunday supplement of the *New York Herald Tribune* with the caption “Lunch Atop a Skyscraper.” It is often mistakenly accredited to the *Empire State Building* (1931) and its famous photographic chronicler *Lewis W. Hine*. The Rockefeller archive attributes the photo to “unknown” because no one was credited, though photos exist by photographers who were taking pictures that very day. The suspects include *Charles Ebbets*, *William Leftwich* and *Thomas Kelley*. It was among many such posed photos taken and distributed to the news media with the intention of promoting Depression-era NYC real estate. A second shot was taken just seconds after the original, the cracked glass negative (bottom) is owned by the *Corbis Collection* and kept in the *Iron Mountain* storage facility, 220-feet beneath the surface of western *Pennsylvania*.

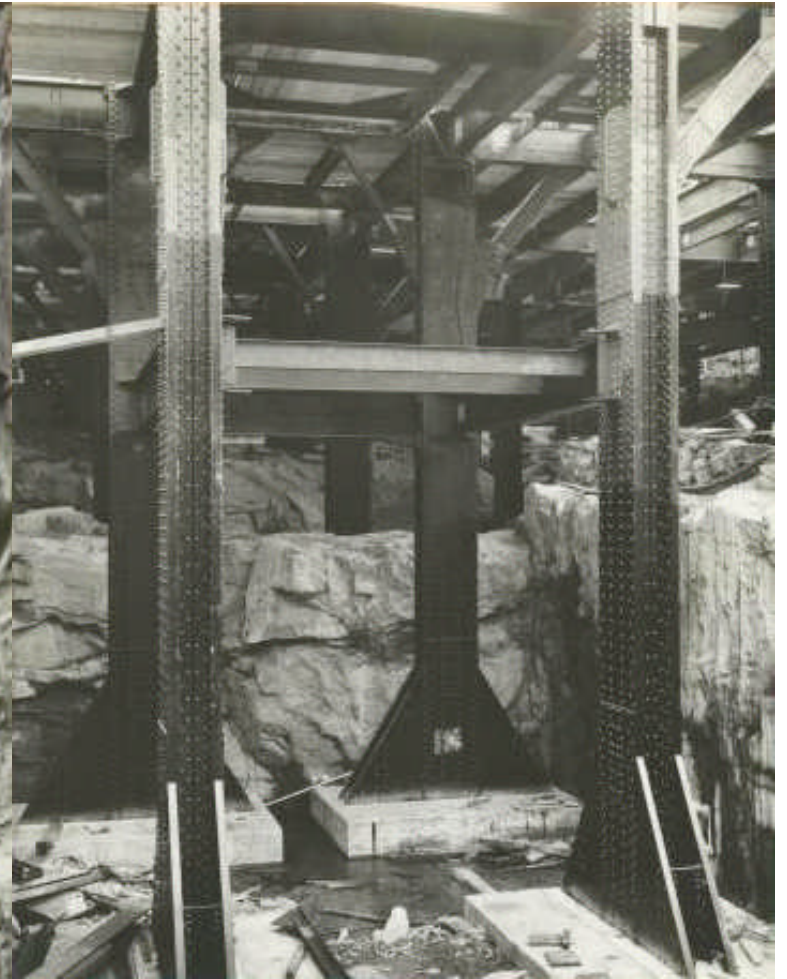




Though the photographer remains anonymous, a documentary film entitled: "Men at Lunch" - produced and directed by the O'Cualain brothers; *Eamonn* and *Sean*, establishes the identity of at least four of the long-anonymous workers. *Joseph Eckner*, third from left and *Joseph Curtis*, third from right, were cross-referenced with other photos that the brothers were shown at RC. Though the famous print itself bears no identification, Eckner and Curtis were almost certainly the same men named on other photos taken that day. Two others (at each end of the row); one lighting a cigarette at the far left of the photograph - *Matty O'Shaughnessy* (top left) while the other is holding a bottle and glaring at the camera at the far right - *Sonny Glynn* (bottom left), were traced to *Ireland* by the O'Cualin brothers, who are natives of *Galway* themselves.

“We mostly hear about the famous architects and financiers, but this one iconic photograph shows the spirit of how Rockefeller Center was built - the fulfillment of the promise of Manhattan. Beauty, service, dignity and humor dangling fifty-six stories above the midstream rush of the metropolis, all summarized in this moment.”

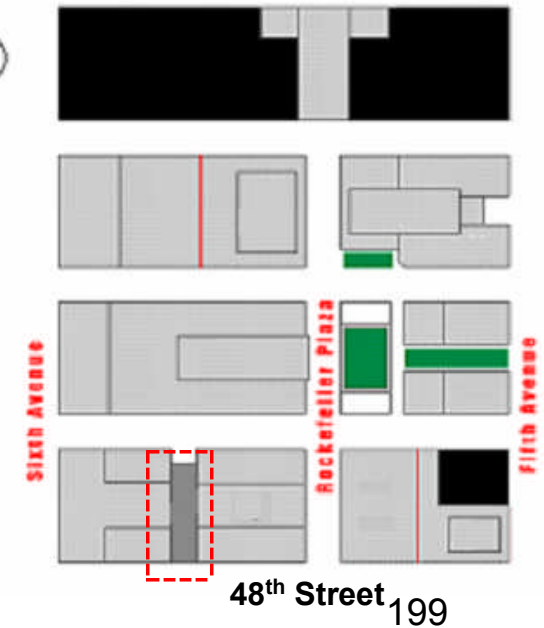
Mystelle Brabbee, Senior Programmer - DOC NYC



Bedrock was found just eight-feet below grade thus the blasters union was called in to create RC's foundations and underground garage and concourse



Above Left: RC underground parking garage entrance
Above Right: interior of parking garage
Left: car being automatically washed in garage (ca. 1940s)
Right: site plan showing West 48th Street garage entrance



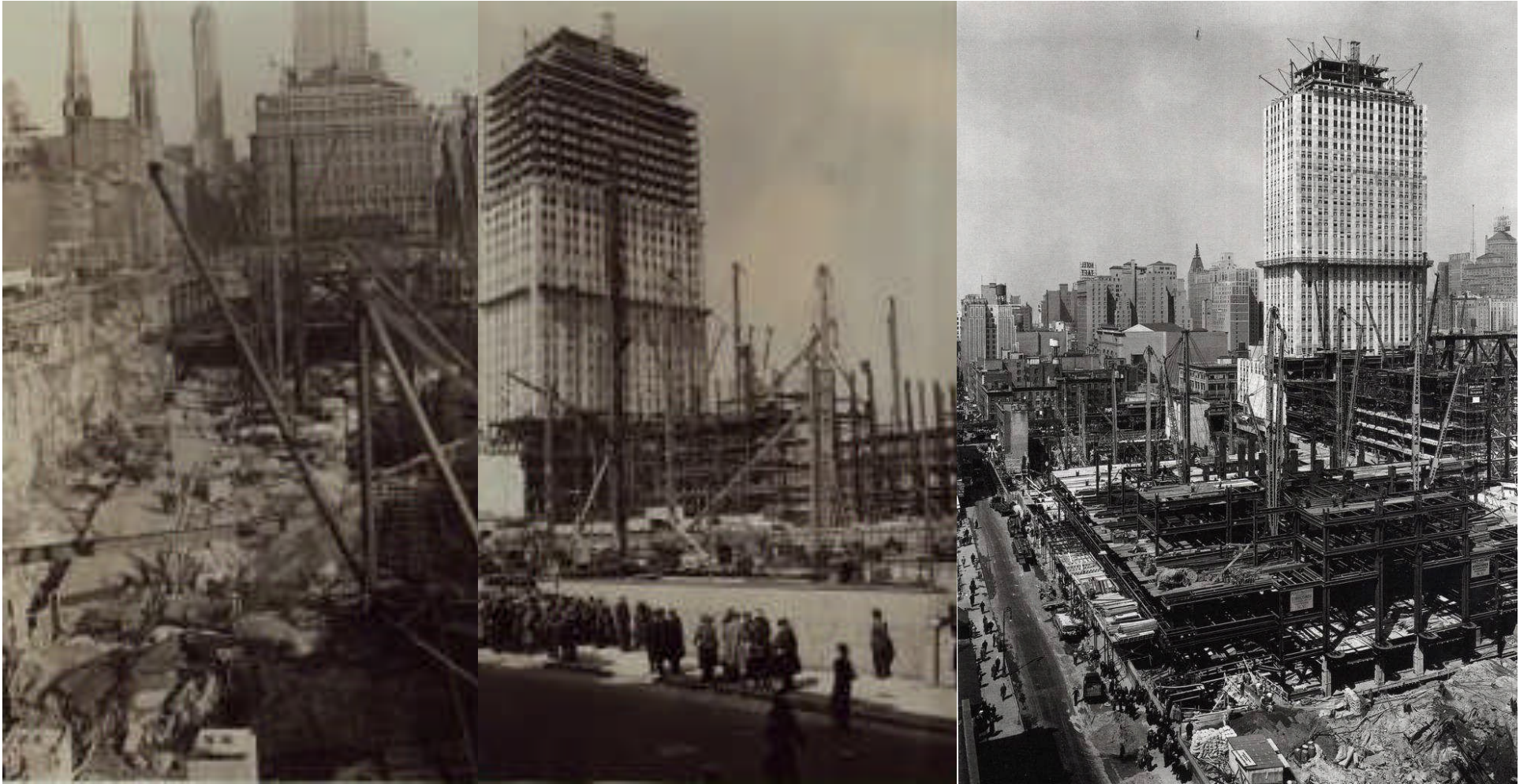


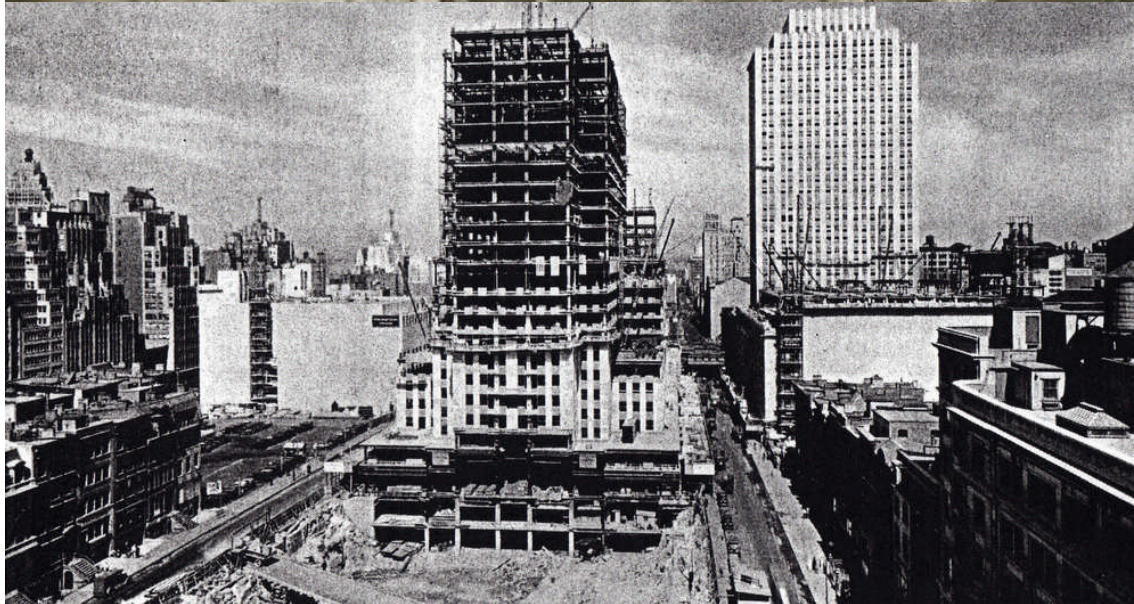
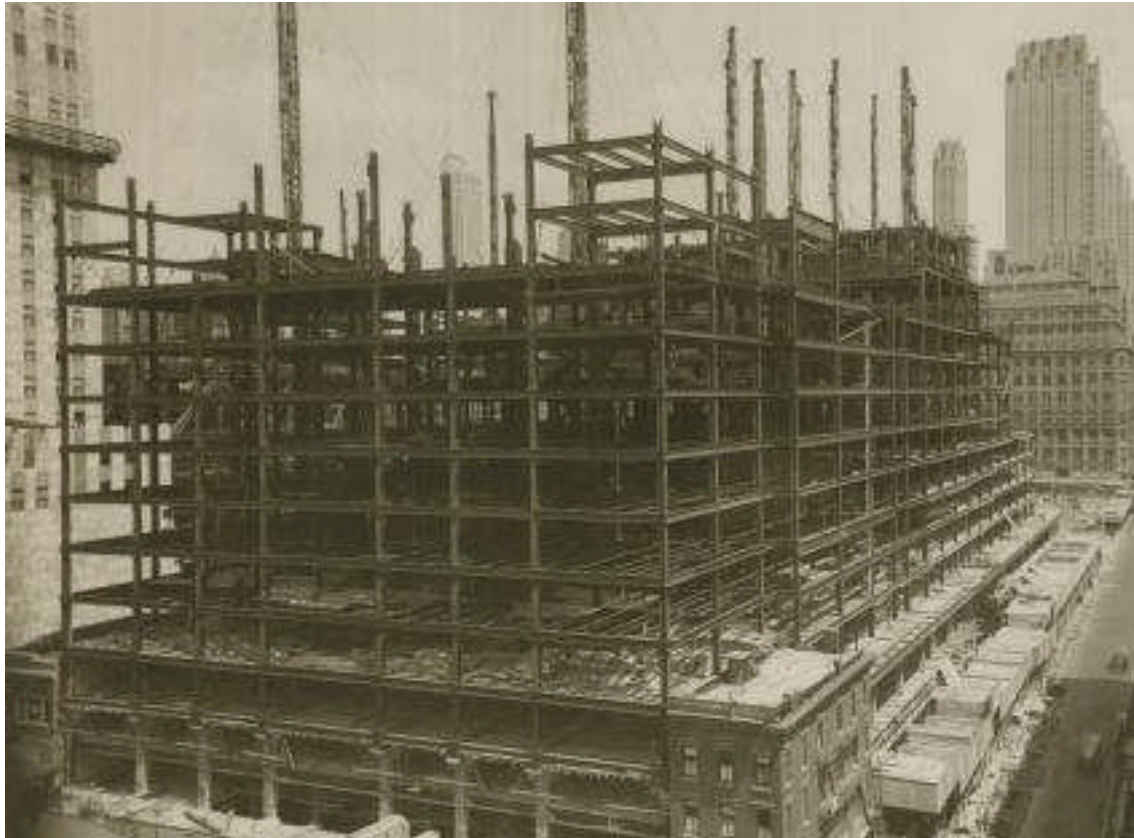


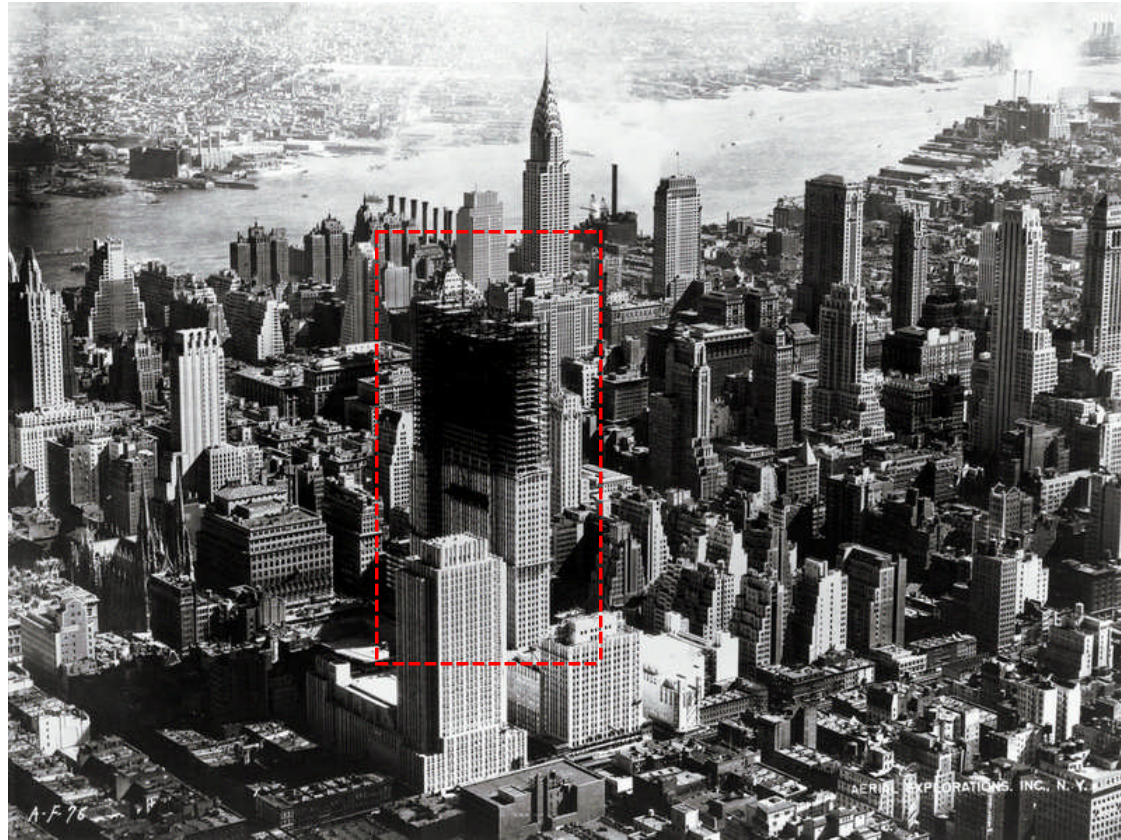














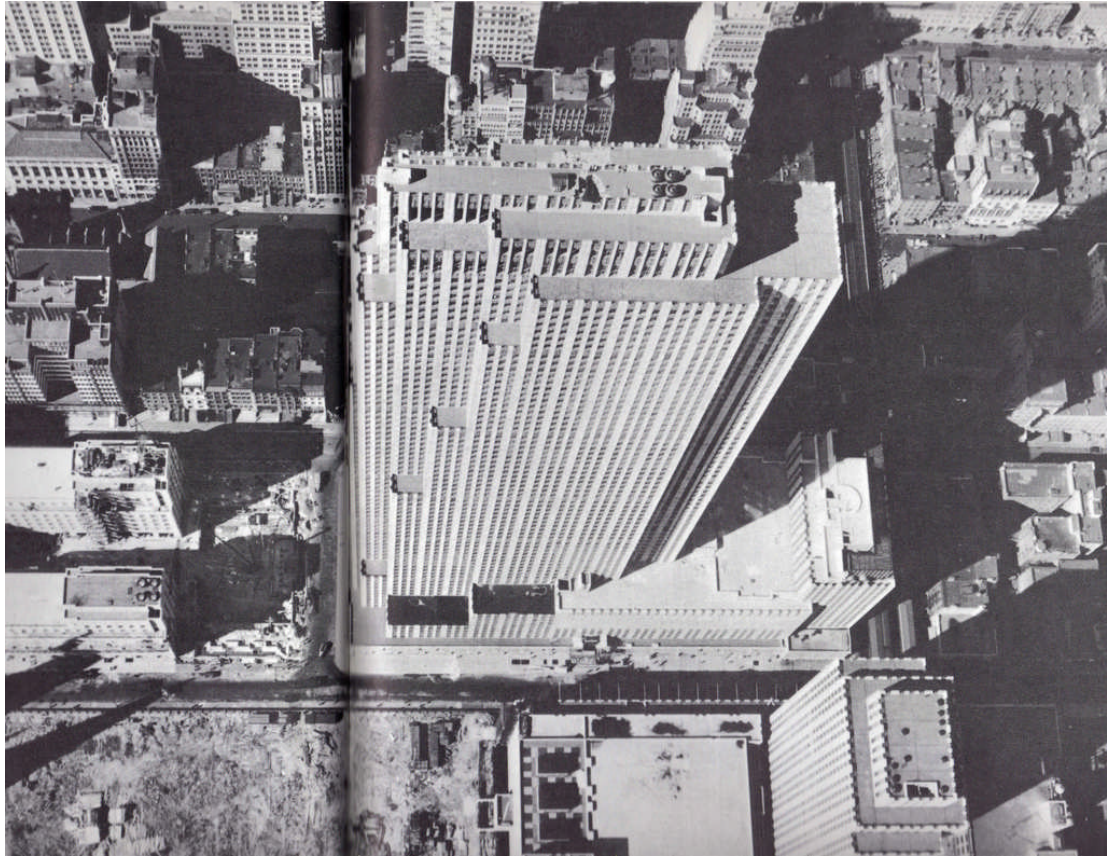


“The pay was good. The thing was, you had to be willing to die.”

John Rasenberger, Author

RE: the well-paying (especially during the *Great Depression*) but inherently dangerous job of the ironworker







Rather than using ordinary brick as first conceived, 30 Rock was clad in grey Indiana limestone sawn by a special process to give it a distinctive texture. A central core, which was commonplace by the late 1920s/early '30s in large commercial buildings in NYC, allowed no office space to be more than twenty-seven feet from an exterior wall (the greatest depth that natural light can penetrate into the interior of a building at NYC's latitude). The pioneering use of air conditioning and the speed of the elevators; an unprecedented 1,400-fpm (700-fpm was the standard for high-speed elevator service set by the *Woolworth Building* in 1913). The elevator doors also feature the first "electric-eye" safety mechanism. Meticulous maintenance and cleanliness of the building also set it apart from the commonplace commercial building of the era. RC set the standard for building operations and maintenance still admired and emulated by the NYC real estate industry.









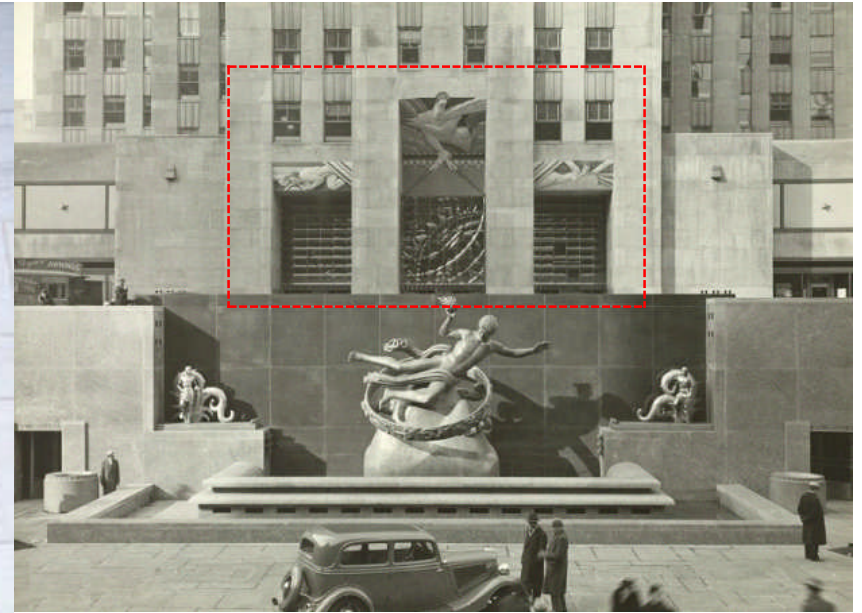


“See for yourself what practicable layouts they make. They are far above the noise and dust of the street – with superb outlook and assured light. The partitions are of heavy steel and glass, finished with a special rich walnut graining. The quality and tone are far more than you would expect in such moderately priced offices. Three-office suite, each with a window, \$2,500. Three-office suite, two offices with a window and reception hall without, \$2,400: This year it’s the RCA Building!”

217

RE: commercial space ad, 1931

Wisdom, Light and Sound



Created by German-born sculptor **Lee Lawrie (1877-1963)** – one of America’s foremost architectural sculptors, “Wisdom, Light and Sound” was a brilliantly conceived entrance to **30 Rockefeller Plaza** (above & left) extending the central decoration across the entire entrance. It combined angled indentation/s and sculpted glass blocks to dynamically express the “Ceremony of Entrance.”





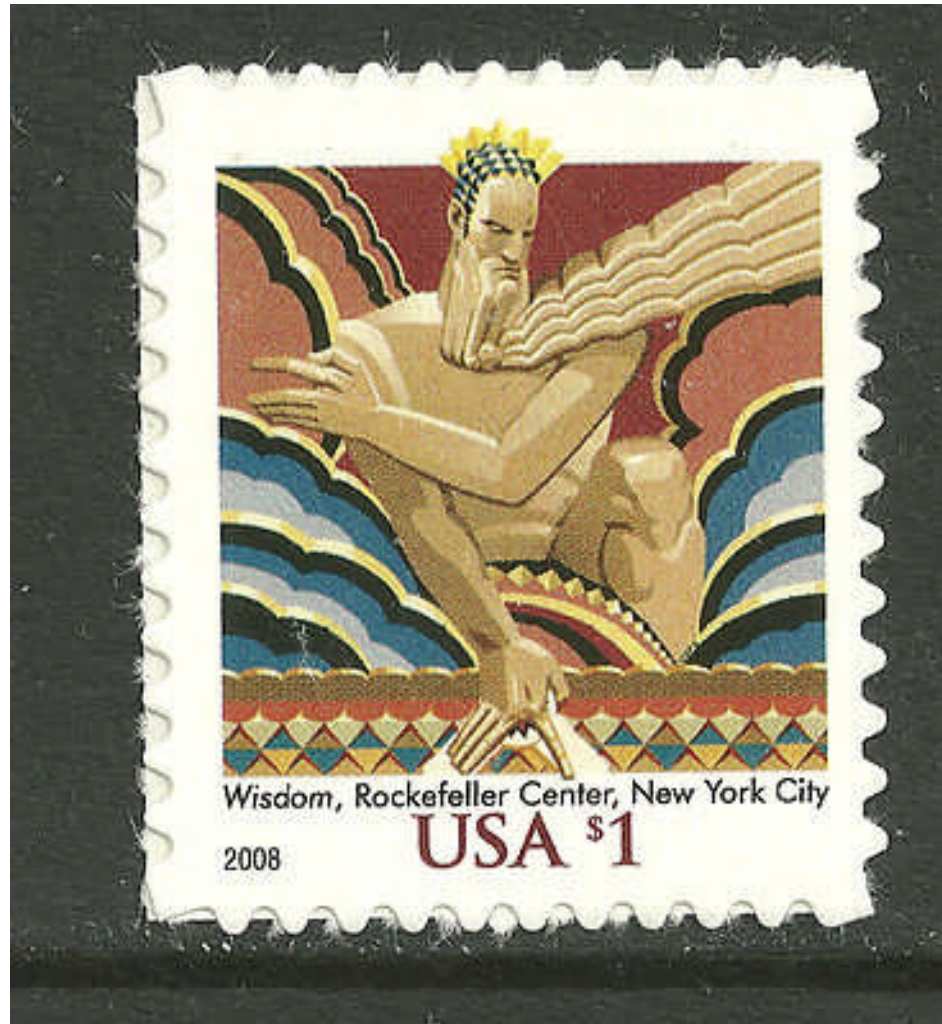
“Wisdom (top center), Light (top left) and Sound (top right)” is a low relief panel carved from Indiana limestone, cast glass, polychrome paint, gilding and stone. An Art Deco icon located directly over the entrance to 30 Rock, its stone portion measures 22-feet high by 14-feet wide and its glass portion measures 15-feet high by 55-feet wide. “Wisdom” is considered the creative power of the universe and the figure’s commanding slant, intimidating expression and biblical quote: *“Wisdom and Knowledge Shall be the Stability of thy Times,”* convey strength, impact and control over man. Also made of the same materials and executed by Lawrie, both “Light” and “Sound” (flanking Wisdom to the left and right) are five-feet high and slanted over the 30 Rock main entrance/s. They herald the advent of radio (sound) and the motion picture industry and television (light) respectively. Light appears to be emerging from cosmic clouds, raising her arms to send electrical images through the ether. Sound appears alert and animated, his voice depicted as circles emanating from his mouth. Wisdom spreads a compass above a glass screen made of 240 blocks of Pyrex cast in eighty-four different molds. The work bears a striking resemblance to William Blake’s 1784 221 frontispiece to: *Europe: A Prophecy* (left).

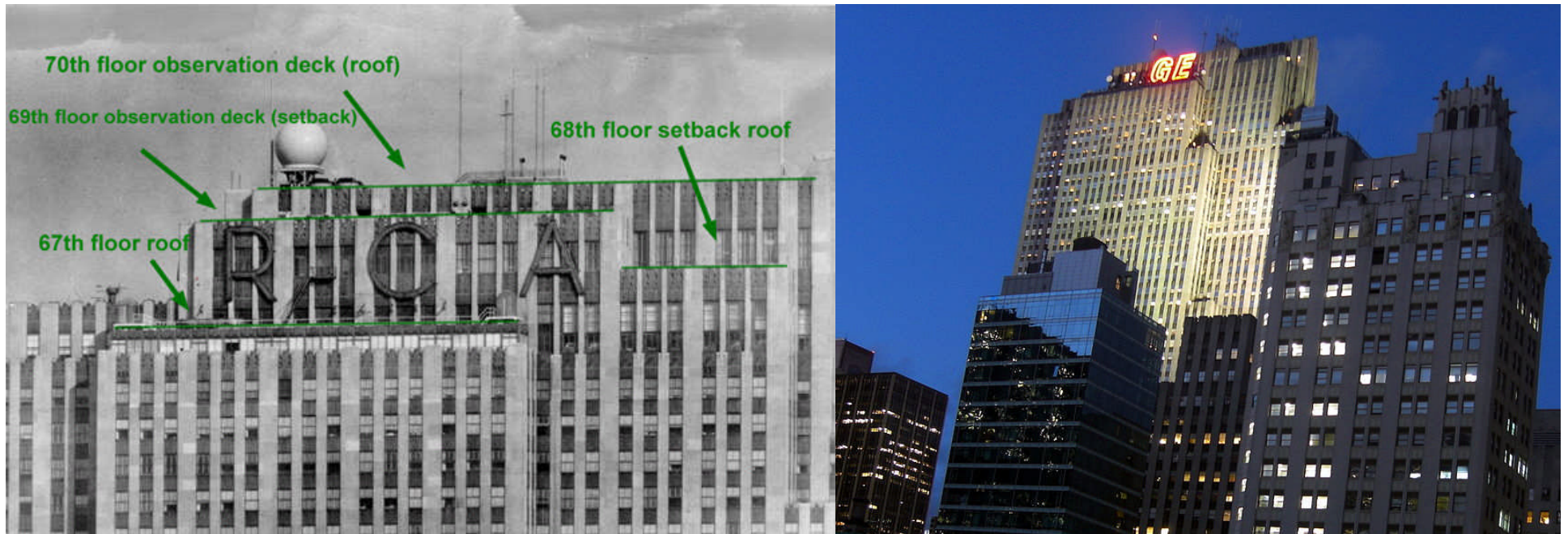












The building was renamed in the 1980s after *General Electric* (GE) re-acquired RCA (it helped found RCA in 1919). The famous *Rainbow Room* club restaurant (opened in 1934, one year after *Prohibition* ended) was located on the 65th floor and the Rockefeller family offices were located on the the 54 through 56th floor/s. 30 Rock remains the headquarters of NBC and houses most of the network's NYC studios. Unlike most NYC skyscrapers built during the "Golden Age of Skyscrapers" (1920s/30s), 30 Rock was constructed with a flat roof where the *Top of the Rock* observation deck/s were located. Opened in 1933, a \$75 million makeover of the observation area/s (spanning from the 67th through 70th floor/s, including a multimedia exhibition exploring the history of RC) was completed in 2005. On the 70th floor, there is a twenty-foot wide viewing area allowing visitors a unique 360-degree panoramic view of the city below and beyond.



When GE decided to replace the large red RCA sign on the north and south sides near the top of 30 Rock with its own red “GE” sign, it upset some traditionalists who had for decades referred to *30 Rockefeller Plaza* as the “RCA Building.” RCA was originally the major tenant in the tall, slender Art Deco tower at *570 Lexington Avenue*. When RCA was lured to *Rockefeller Center*, its former building became the GE building. That building was donated to *Columbia University* after GE put its sign up at *30 Rockefeller Plaza*.

Top of the Rock

Rockefeller Center Observation Road Atop R.C.A. Building New York City



In 1986, RC decided to close the multi-level observatory atop 30 *Rockefeller Plaza* in order to provide more space for its *Rainbow Room* and *Rainbow Grill* restaurant/lounge complex. At a cost \$75 million, it reopened in 2005 to much critical praise.







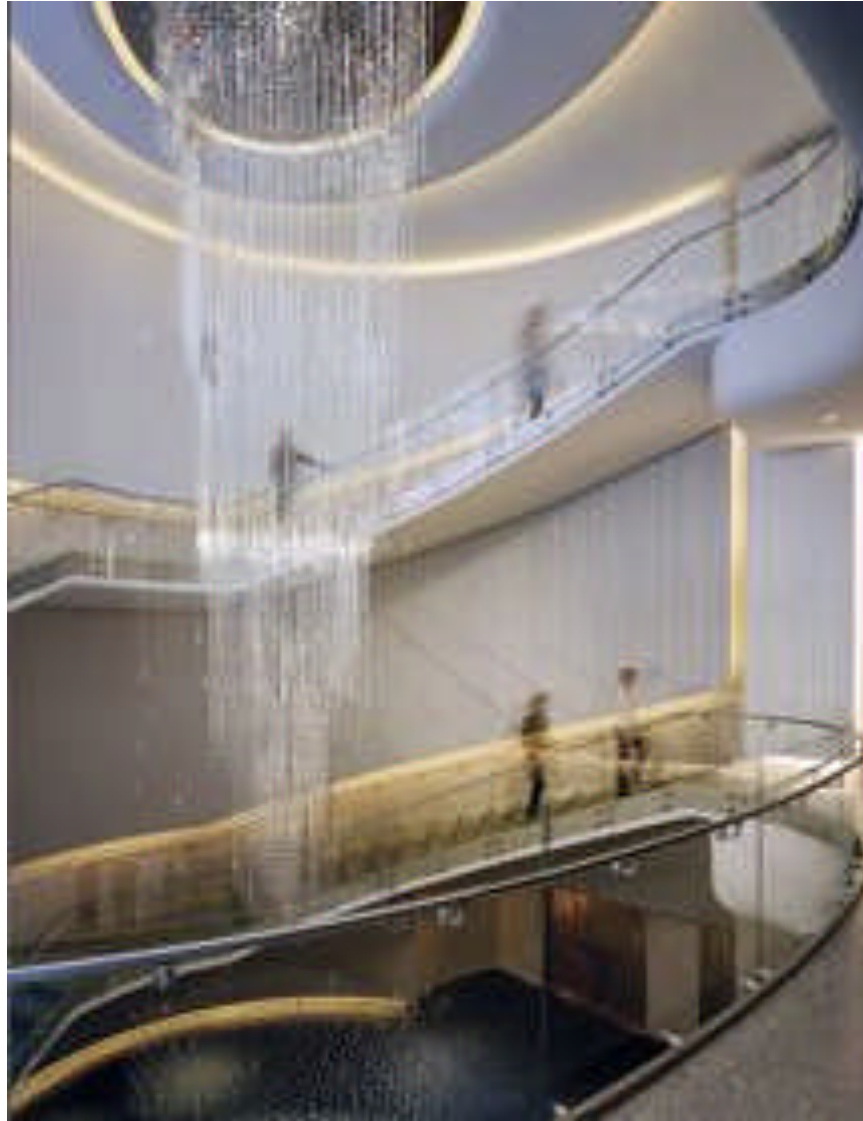
Originally, the trip to the observatory began from an elevator in the main lobby of the building. Now, the observatory has its own special entrance on *West 50th Street* that leads to graphic displays outlining the history of the building. On the second floor of this special entrance, visitors walk over a girder flanked by glass flooring

Above: main entrance to the *Top of the Rock*, 50th Street between 5th and 6th Avenue/s



Visitors are ushered into one of two small elevators with glass roofs for rides up an illuminated elevator shaft to arrive at the lowest level (enclosed) of the three-level observatory. At this level, visitors first take notice of the large glass prism wall (above) and tall windows. Escalators then take visitors up one level where there are outdoor promenades with large glass walls and a gift shop.

Above: caption: “Glass-prism wall at base of tri-level observatory”





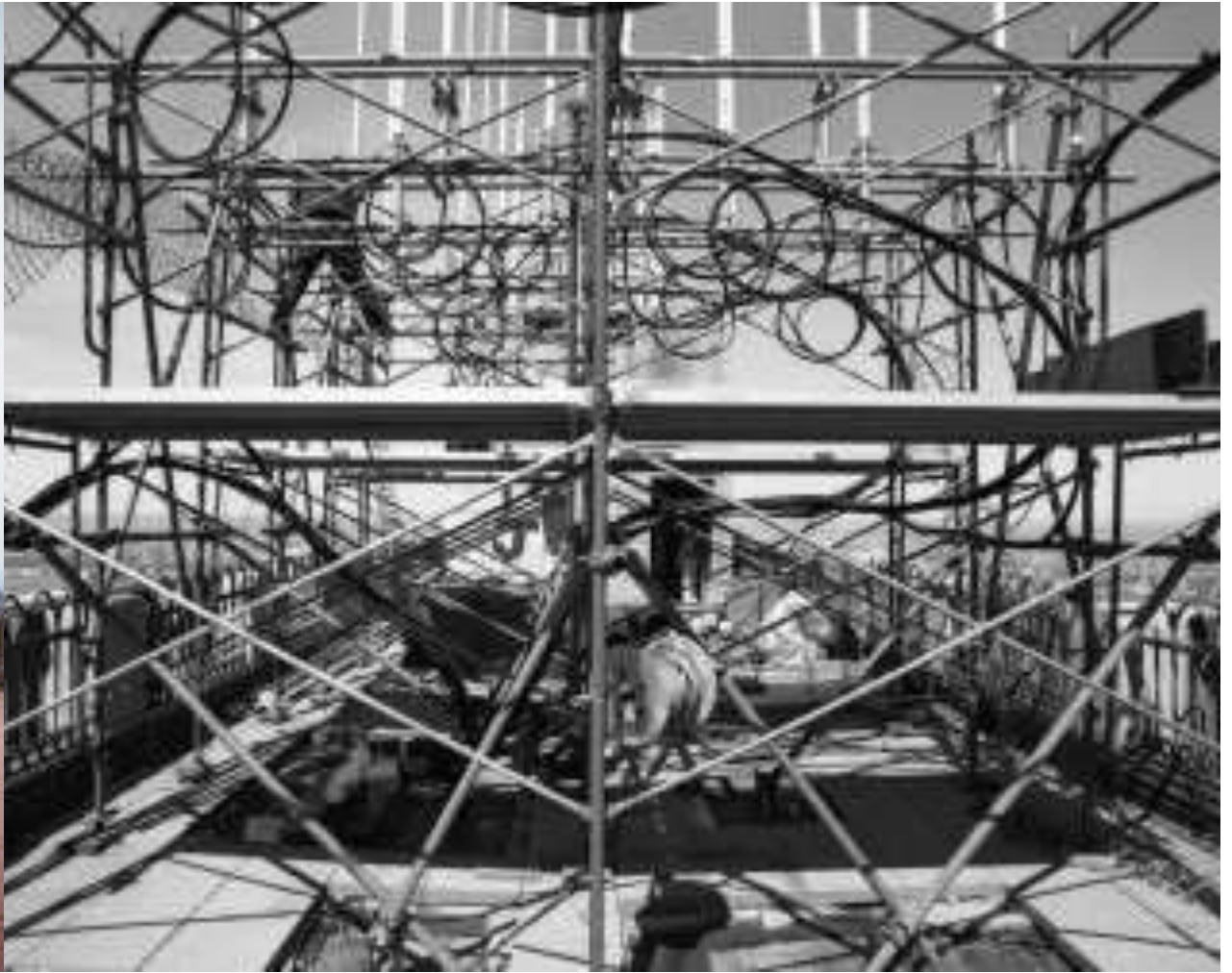
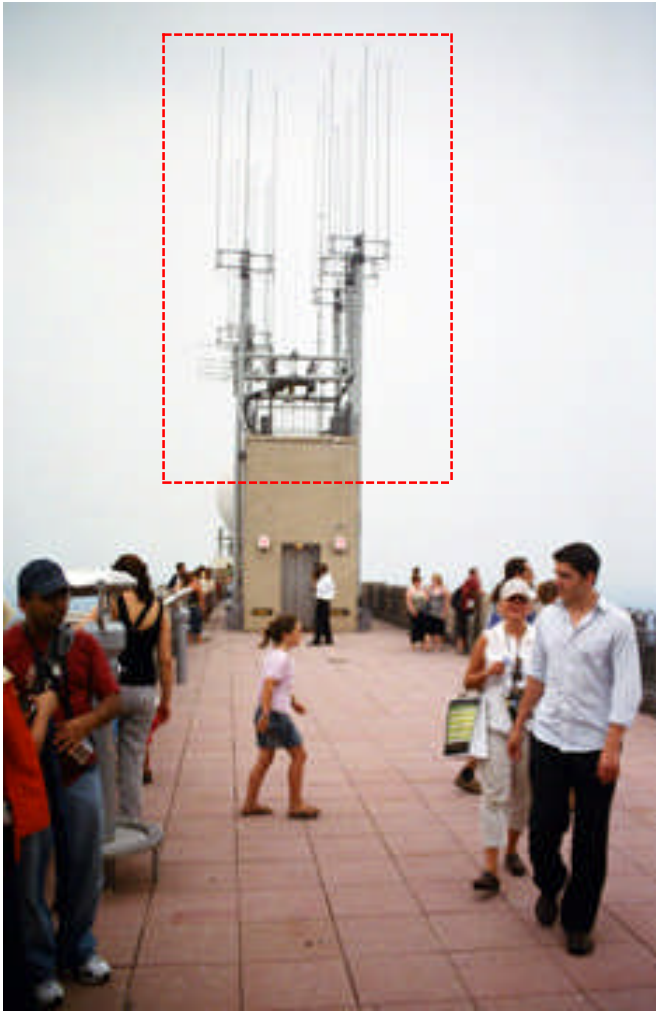
“...the ascent along illuminated shafts to the 67th floor where they will find indoor observation areas, escalators will take them higher yet, to outdoor terraces on the 69th floor, shielded from the wind by new eight-and-a-half-foot-high glass barriers. But the 70th-floor summit, 850-feet above the street, will still be completely open to the elements...”

The New York Times, March 11th 2005

Left: caption: “Chandelier in West 50th Street entrance to Top of the Rock observatory”







One flight up to the roof level offers unobstructed views in all directions and arrays of high-tech antennas (above)



Above: Vikings conquer *Top Of The Rock*. This band of Norsemen traveled all the way from the *Shetland Islands* for NYC's Tartan celebration and parade.

The Room with the View



You're Sitting on Top of the World!

Enjoy your favorite cocktail served in air-conditioned luxury, high above Manhattan. Music, hot hors d'oeuvres, no additional or minimum charge. Open 4:30 to 9, except Sunday. CI 6-5800.

Rainbow Room
 "THE ROOM WITH THE VIEW"

Above: New Year's eve 1935 celebration in the Rainbow Room





“Rainbow Room’s new show, introduced this week, is a gay diversion highlighted by the colorful performance of Jack Cole and his Dancers. In fact there is probably more down-to-earth light entertainment in this show than in any that the Rainbow Room has offered in quite a spell... Cole is no stranger to the Rainbow Room, having appeared there on several occasions during the last few seasons...”

The New York Sun, May 18th 1942

Above: the Cole Dancers performing in the Rainbow Room



The Lobby

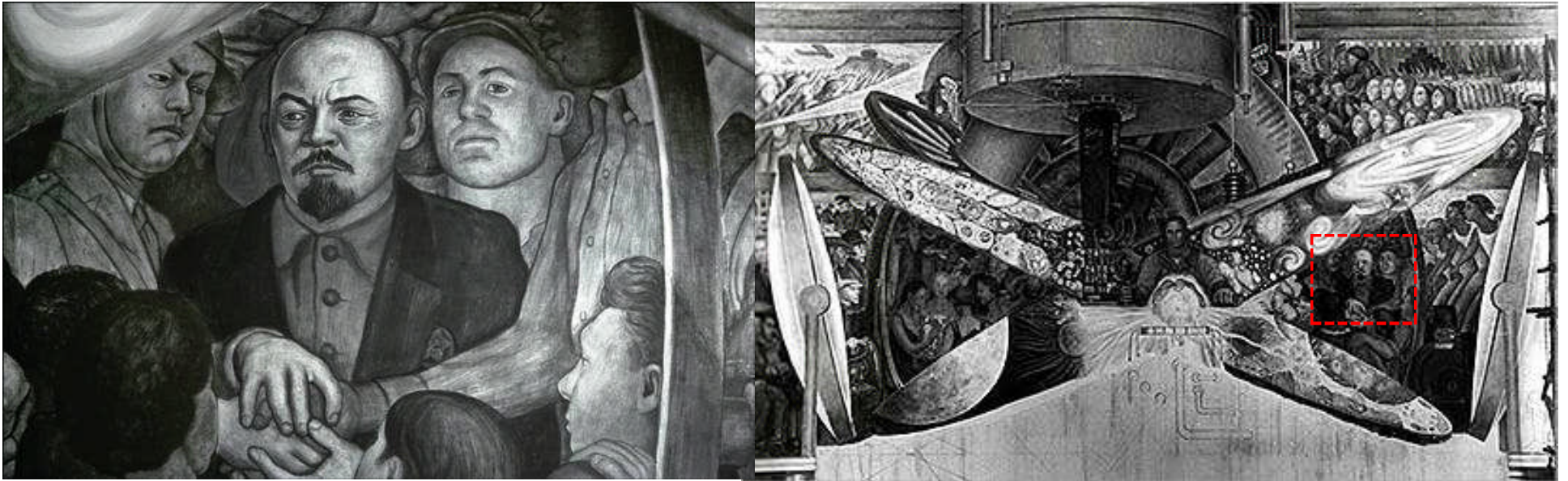


A list of competitors, approved by *John .D. Rockefeller, Jr.* to execute murals for the expansive lobby at *30 Rockefeller Plaza* (above) included *Matisse, Picasso, Frank Brangwyn, Jose Maria Sert* and *Diego Rivera*. Picasso declined to even meet with the project’s architects and Matisse disdained the notion of people in an office building lobby being able to be: *“in a quiet and reflective state of mind to appreciate or even see the qualities”* of his art.

Man at the Crossroads



By 1930, Mexican muralist *Diego Rivera* (above & left) had gained international favor for his passionate murals. Inspired by Communist ideals and an intense devotion to his cultural heritage, Rivera – an avowed communist, created boldly hued masterpieces of public art that adorned the municipal buildings of *Mexico City*. His extraverted personality put him at the center of a circle of left-wing painters and poets and his talent attracted wealthy patrons, including *Abby Aldrich Rockefeller*. In 1932, she convinced her capitalist husband, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.*, to commission a mural for the lobby of *30 Rockefeller Plaza*.



Rivera proposed a 63-foot-long portrait of workers facing symbolic crossroads of industry, science, socialism and capitalism entitled: “Man at the Crossroads.” He believed that his personal friendship with the Rockefeller family would allow him to insert an unapproved representation of Soviet leader *Vladimir Lenin* (left) into a section of the mural portraying a *May Day* parade (mural in progress at right). However, the real decision-making power lay with the RC’s building managers who resented Rivera’s propagandistic approach to the mural. Horrified by newspaper articles attacking the mural’s anti-capitalist ideology, they ordered Rivera to remove the offending image of Lenin. Rivera refused, offering to balance the work with a portrait of *Abraham Lincoln* on the opposing side.



Dear Mr. Rivera:

When I was in the No. 1 building at Rockefeller Center yesterday viewing the progress of your thrilling mural I noticed that in the most recent portion of the painting you included a portrait of Lenin. The piece is beautifully painted but it seems to me that his portrait appearing in this public mural might very easily seriously offend a great many people. If it were in a private house it would be one thing, but this mural is in a public building and the situation is therefore quite different. As much as I dislike to do so, I am afraid I must ask you to substitute the face of some unknown man where Lenin's face now appears.

You know how enthusiastic I am about the work which you have been doing and that to date we have in no way restricted you in either subject or treatment. I am sure you will understand our feeling in this situation and we will greatly appreciate your making the suggested substitution.

Sincerely,

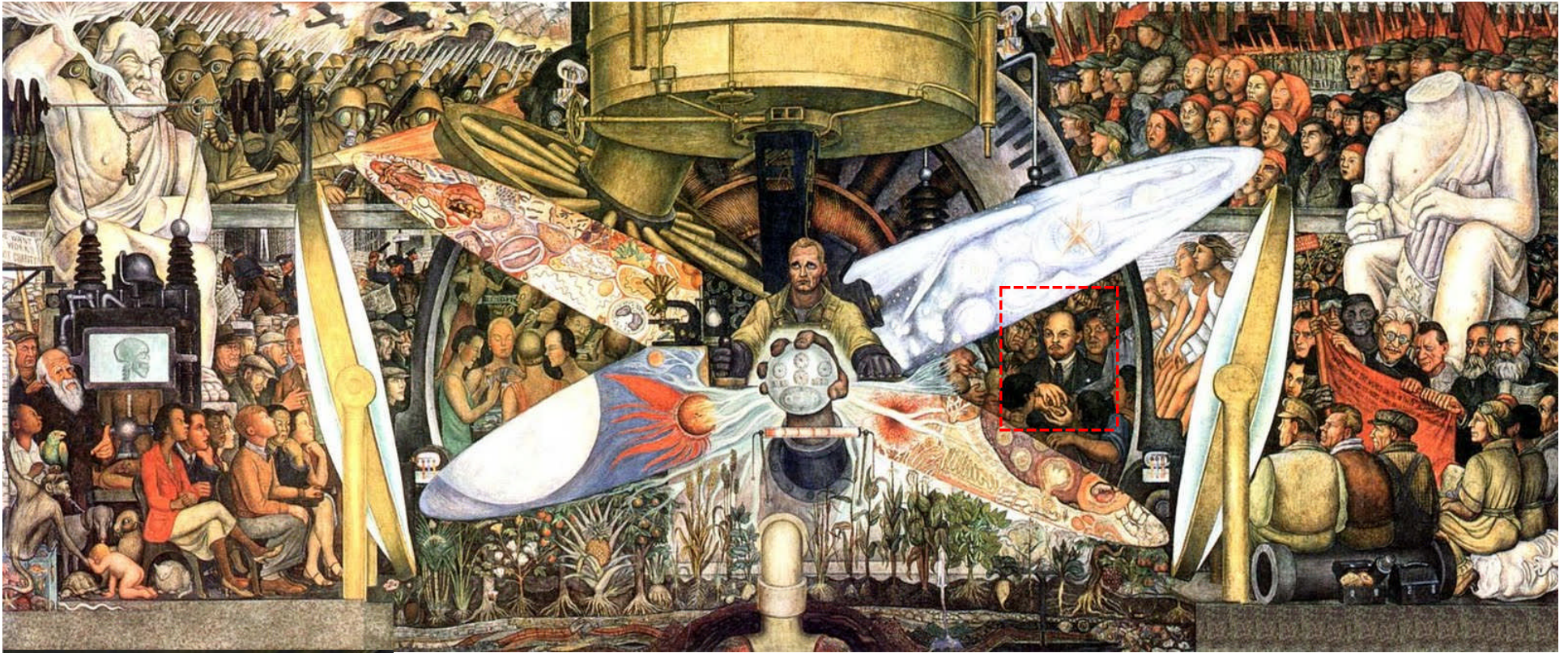
Nelson A. Rockefeller

Left: Nelson A. Rockefeller

Right: Diego Rivera



The *Rockefeller Center* managers rejected Rivera's offer to add Lincoln to the mural and instead paid his full fee, barred him from the site and hid the mural behind a massive drape (left). Despite negotiations to transfer the work to the *Museum of Modern Art* and demonstrations by Rivera supporters (right), near midnight on February 10th 1934, RC workmen demolished the mural with axes.



Rivera would later recreate the 30 Rock mural in the *Palace of Fine Arts* in *Mexico City*, adding a portrait of *John D. Rockefeller, Jr.* in a nightclub. Rivera never worked in the *United States* again, but continued to be active, both politically and artistically, until his death in 1957.

Above: recreation by *Diego Garcia* of the RC mural at *Palacio de Bellas Artes*

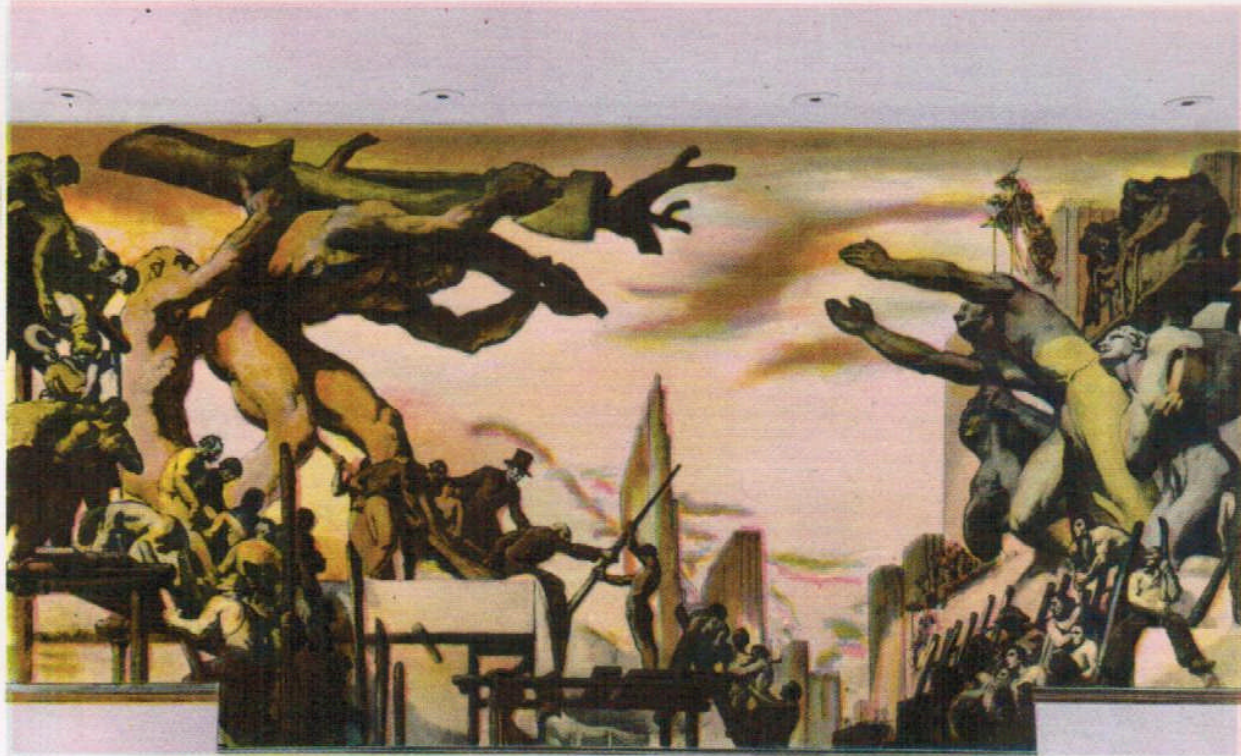
Left: cartoon depicting J.D. Rockefeller, Jr. discovering Lenin's portrayal on the RC mural

American Progress



Born in *Barcelona*, Spanish artist *Jose Maria Sert* (1876-1845) spent most of his adult life in *Paris* and was internationally known as a mural painter. After the Rockefellers fired *Diego Rivera*, Sert was commissioned to execute the focal point mural in 30 Rock's lobby. "American Progress" allegorically depicts the development of *America* through the unity of brain and brawn. The "three graces" symbolize man's intellectual activity while Titans and men working represent men of action. *Abraham Lincoln*, *Ralph Waldo Emerson* and the skyscrapers of RC itself all play prominent roles in the mural. Situated behind the information desk, it is an oil-on-canvas measuring 41-feet long by sixteen-feet, seven-inches high (above). It was installed in 1937 and fully restored in 2010.

Mural by Jose Maria Sert in the Great Hall of the R.C.A. Building



Time



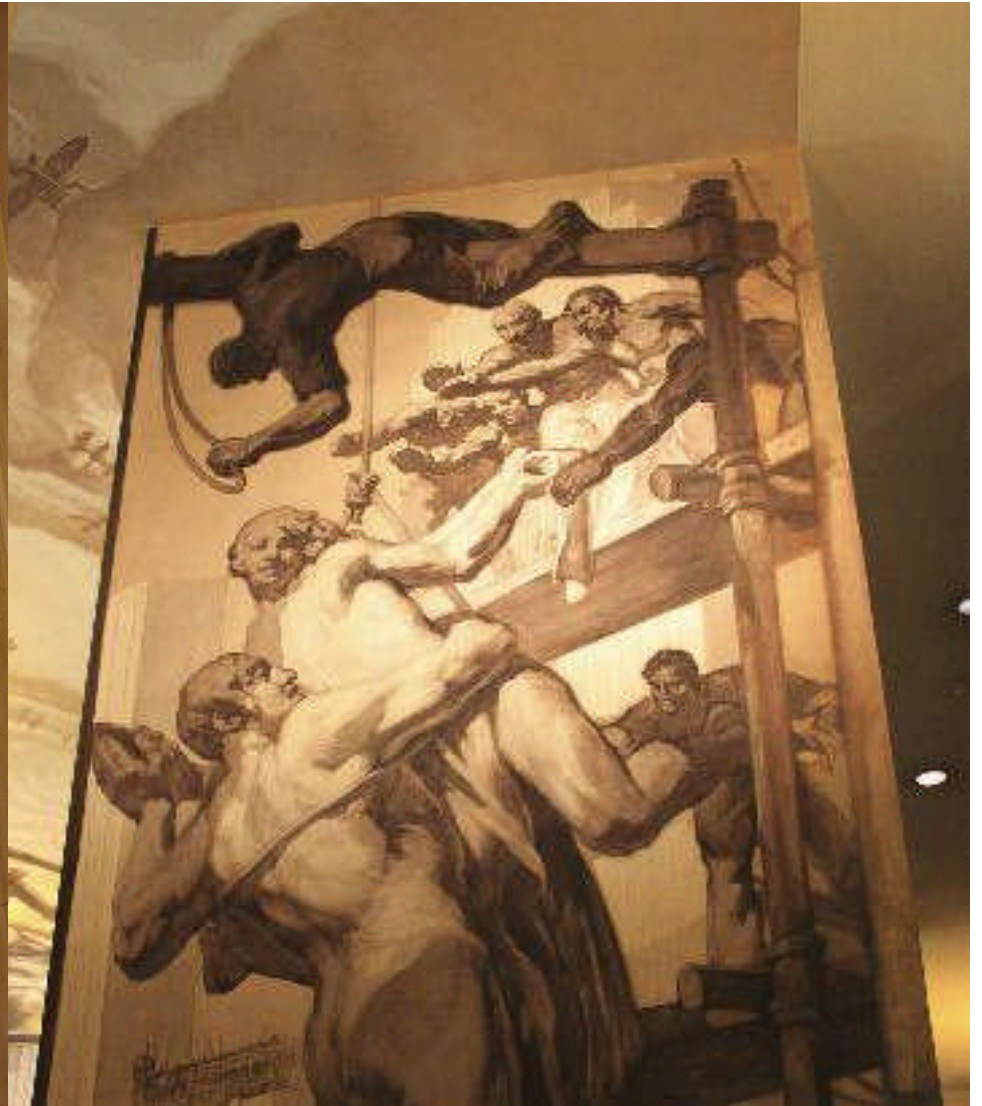
The dramatic 5K-square foot oil-on-canvas ceiling mural in 30 Rock's lobby by Sert depicts heroic-sized Titans symbolizing the three aspects of time: Past, Present and Future. By exposing their muscular bodies, the implication is that time is both powerful and part of nature. The Titans are portrayed evaluating man's achievements with the mural integrating the building's architecture into the subject matter. Both the "scales" (left) and the Titans' feet (L&R) are depicted resting on the lobby's marble columns which support the ceiling itself. The effect is to create a panoramic vision of the weighing of man's deeds.



Spirit of Dance



Sert's submission for "American Progress" did not wrap the corners of the wall thus, he was asked to provide two additional murals for these walls. The north mural entitled "Spirit of Dance" (highlighted at left) expresses joy and release from the problems of the world. The heavy rope that ties the large central figures together symbolizes mankind being tied to the problems of the everyday world. Six other figures reach out to release them from their bonds and as these restraints fall away, the central figures dance blissfully. It is also an oil on canvas measuring 25-foot high by 17-foot wide and is located in the Main Lobby's *North Hall*. It was installed in 1941.



Above: close-up of “Spirit of Dance”

Left: South Hall mural by Sert 262

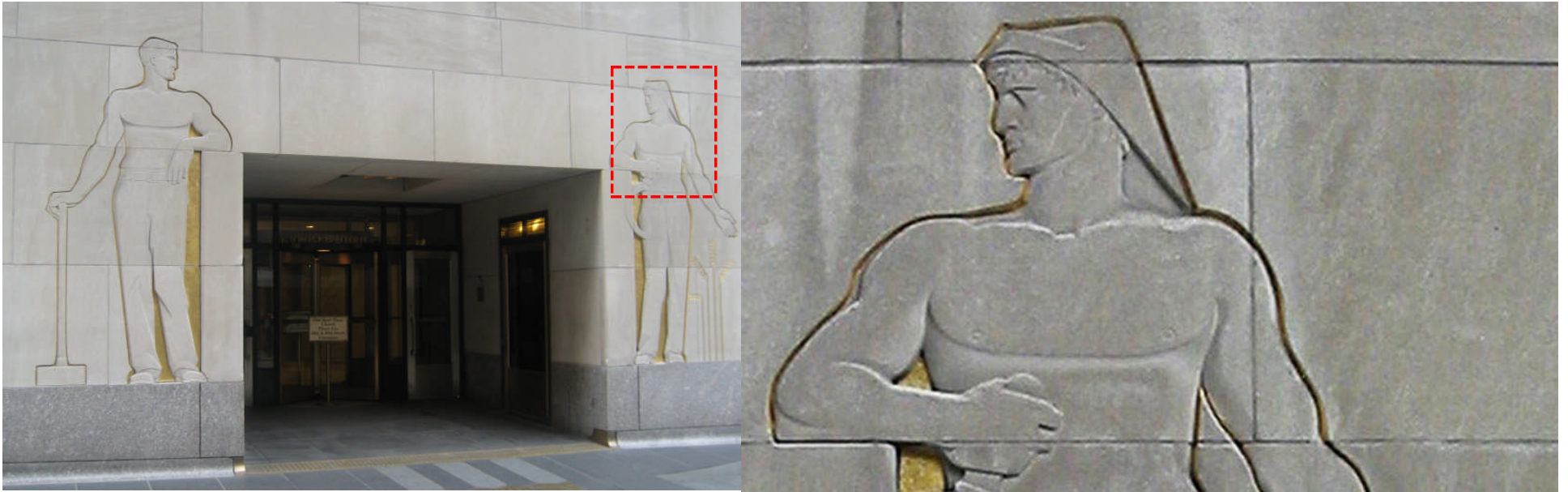
Part 4

Art Triumphant

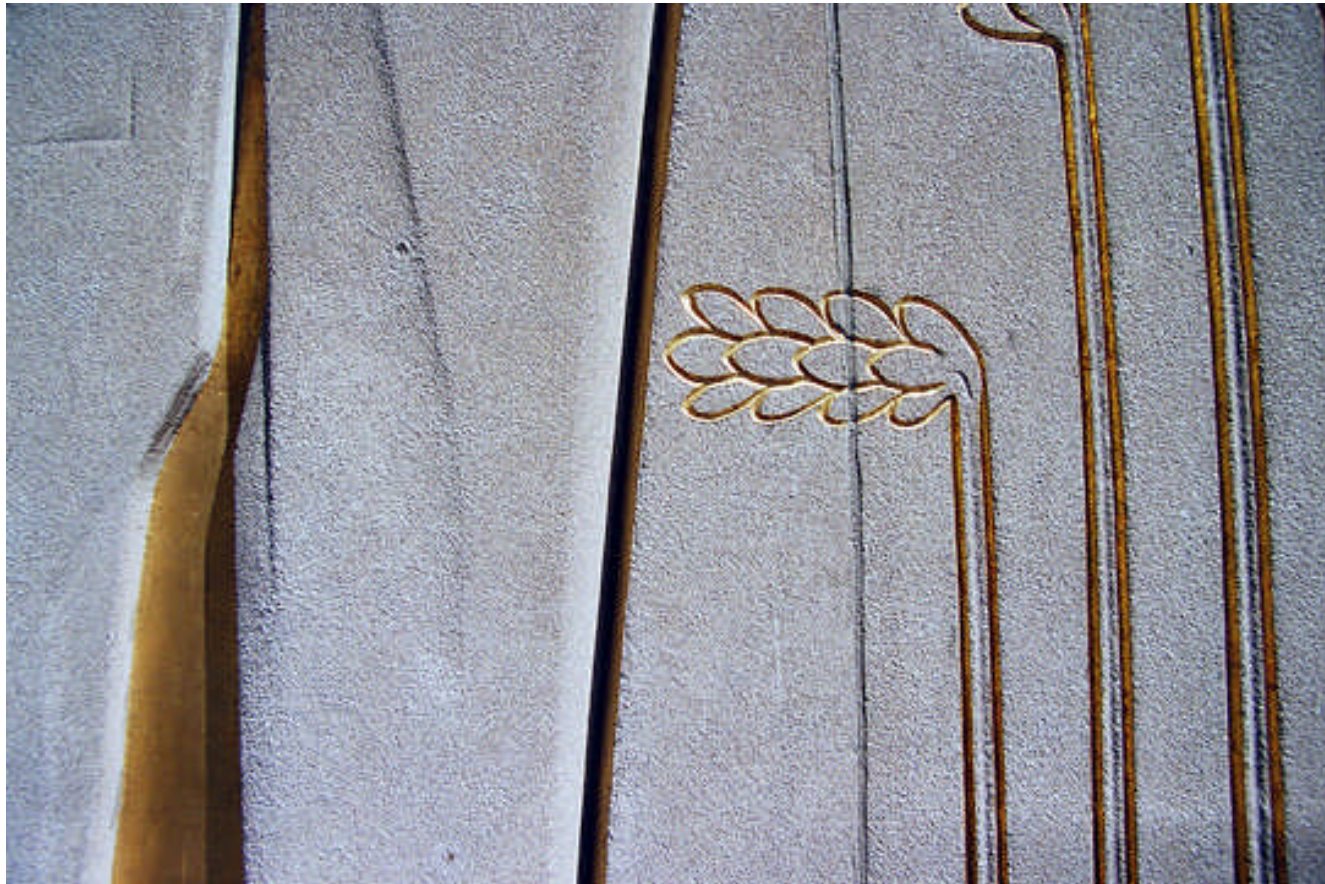
As Beautiful as Possible

In 1932, *J.D. Rockefeller, Jr.* set aside \$150K for artworks to enhance RC and formed an *Advisory Art Committee* to find painters and sculptors to make the project: “as beautiful as possible.” *Abby Aldrich* and *Nelson Rockefeller* were two of the moving forces behind this idea. All of the art was to illustrate the general theme of: “The Progress of Man.” No commercial enterprise before or since comes close to matching RC’s public collection of painting and sculpture; some two-hundred individual works by nearly fifty noted artists.

1 Rockefeller Plaza

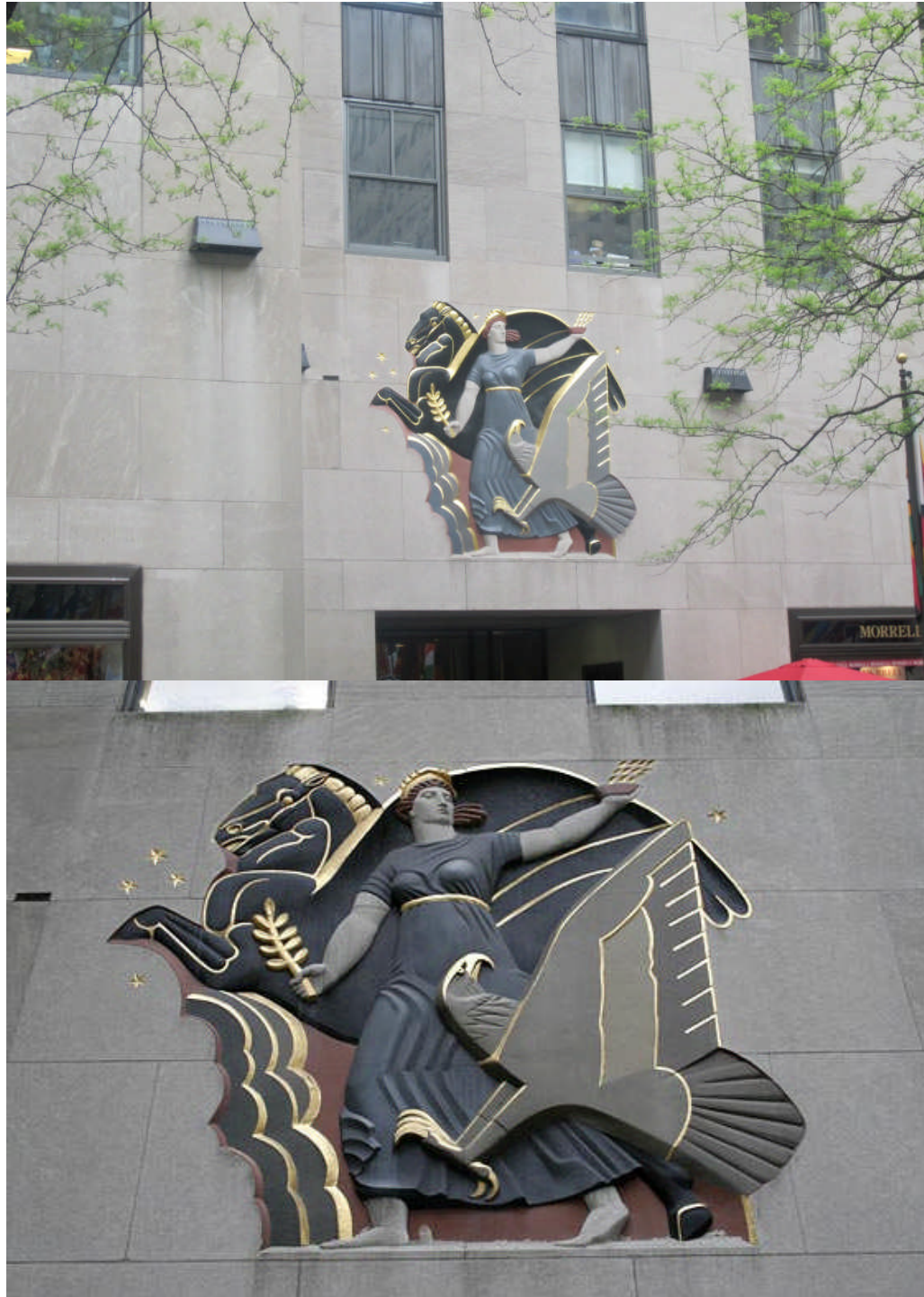


Flanking the main entrance to *One Rockefeller Plaza* are two eight-foot high gilded “Intaglio” carvings in limestone executed in 1937 by German-born artist *Carl Paul Jennewein* (1890-1978). Entitled: “Industry and Agriculture,” these two heroic-sized carvings represent the commercial activities of industry and agriculture, depicting universal activities rather than individuals. The figure at left holds a shovel, symbolizing industry, while the figure at right hold a scythe gesturing to shafts of wheat, representing the harvest/agriculture. A common Art Deco theme, it is a straightforward interpretation of workers and their work. The strong and idealized figures signify the roots of American prosperity while promoting its strong work ethic.



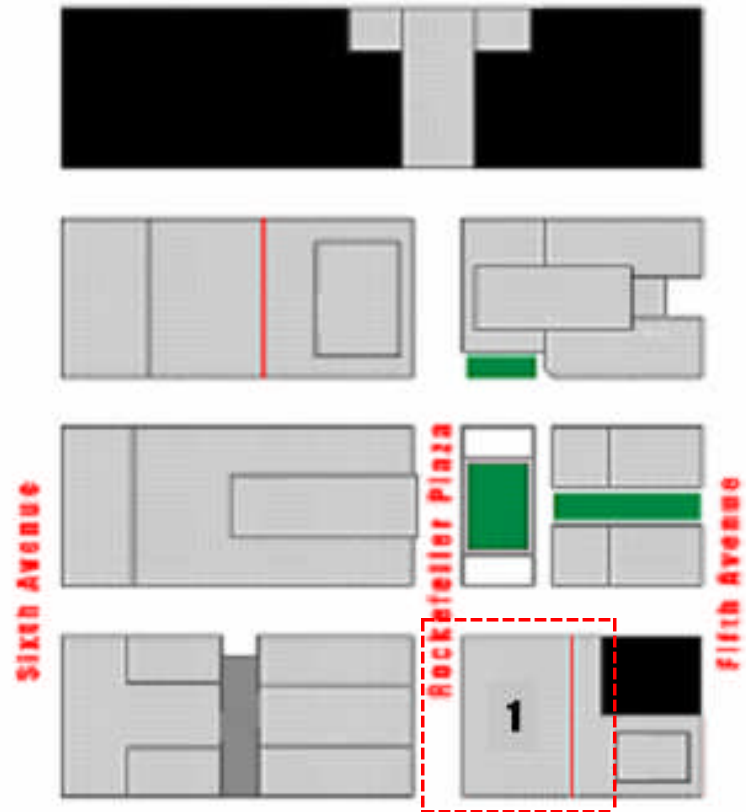


Sculptor *Lee Lawrie* executed this polychrome paint and gilding Intaglio bas-relief carving in limestone above the *49th Street* entrance to *One Rockefeller Plaza* in 1937. Entitled: “Progress,” it is a true icon of the Art Deco style in allegory. It has bold and flat geometric shapes, strong colors and stylized forms and is highly decorative. The main character depicted is *Columbia* – the traditional female figure representing *America*. She wears a simple peasant dress while the figure is athletic and the face is composed and devoid of emotion. In her left hand, she holds the cup of divine knowledge while in her right hand she holds an olive branch, symbol of peace. *Pegasus* – the mythological horse, is placed behind Columbia as a symbol of inspiration. The eagle in the foreground represents power.





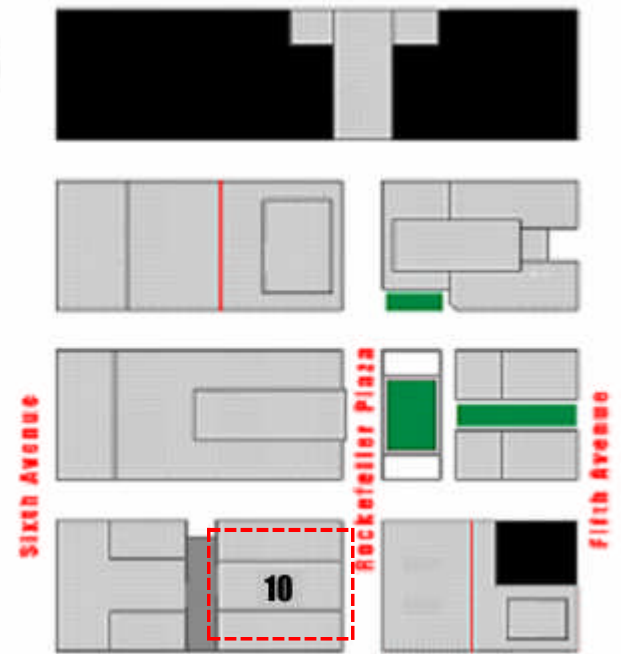
Italian-born sculptor *Attilio Piccirilli* (1868-1945) executed this bas-relief carving in limestone with polychrome paint and gilding above the *48th Street* entrance to *One Rockefeller Plaza* in 1937. Entitled: “The Joy of Life,” it portrays the “joy” of life as wine. A peculiar choice considering J.D. Rockefeller, Jr.’s advocacy of temperance and support of *Prohibition*. The main character is *Bacchus*, the Roman god of wine and revelry who taught mankind the cultivation of the grape and winemaking. He is depicted sitting on the ground in the center of the scene surrounded by a group and he is holding grapes in his right hand over his head. Lighthearted and decorative, the grey figures stand in bold contrast to the brilliant blue sky background.



10 Rockefeller Plaza



American artist *Dean Cornwell* (1892-1960) executed this large “Tripartite” mural on canvas using oil paint, gold and silver leaf in 1946. Located in the Main Lobby of *10 Rockefeller Plaza*, its center panel measures 54-feet wide by 20-feet high. With the post-WWII advances in the aviation industry, the mural was commissioned to celebrate the dawn of commercial air travel. Spanning three walls of the lobby and collectively entitled: “History of Transportation,” its three parts are subtitled *Night Flight*, *New World Unity* and *Day Flight*. Using montage, the mural/s begin with outdated modes of transportation relevant to the development of *America*. The main tenant of the building was *Eastern Airlines* and its then president; race-car driver and WWI ace *Eddie Rickenbacker*, featured prominently in the mural, along with a falcon and goddesses. Cornwell was a prominent illustrator with works appearing in leading magazines of the day.²⁷⁴



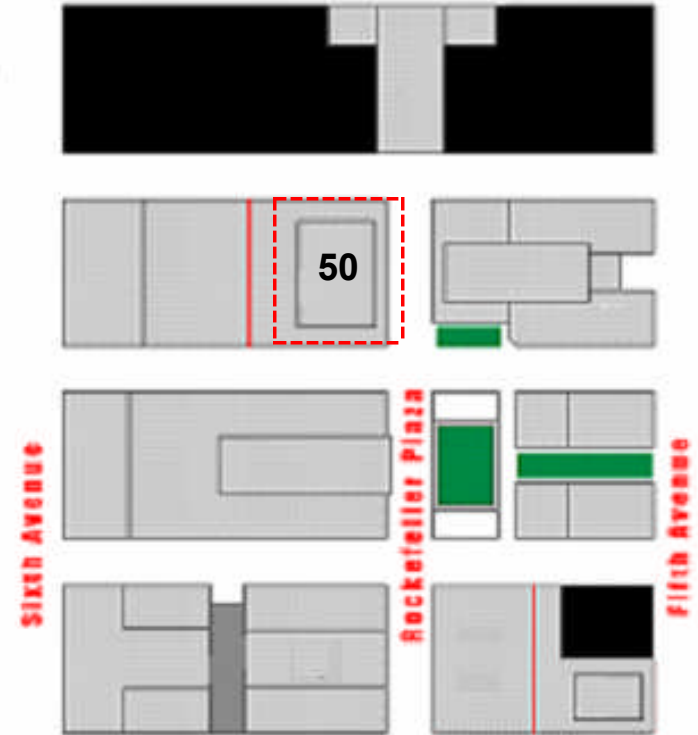
50 Rockefeller Plaza



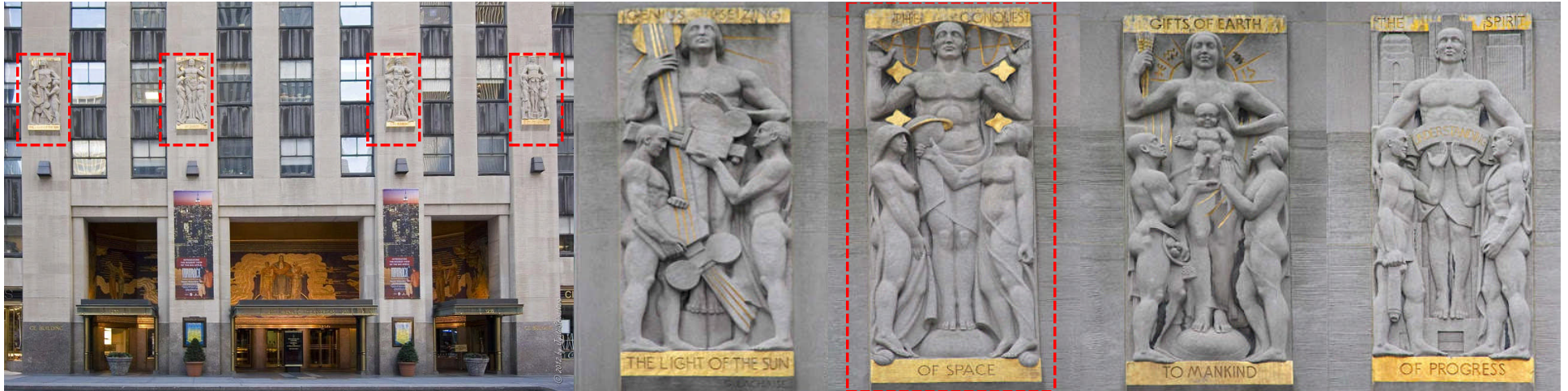
Above the main entrance to *50 Rockefeller Plaza* is this low relief, ten-ton cast stainless steel panel entitled: “News.” Measuring 22-feet wide by 17-feet high, it was executed by Japanese-American sculptor *Isamu Noguchi* (1904-1988) in 1940. Considered one of the major Art Deco works of RC, it adorns the entrance to the former home of the *Associated Press* (AP). It depicts five journalists focused on getting a “scoop” while the radiating diagonal lines represent AP’s worldwide network. It was the first large-scale sculpture cast in stainless steel and the first and only time Noguchi worked in the medium.







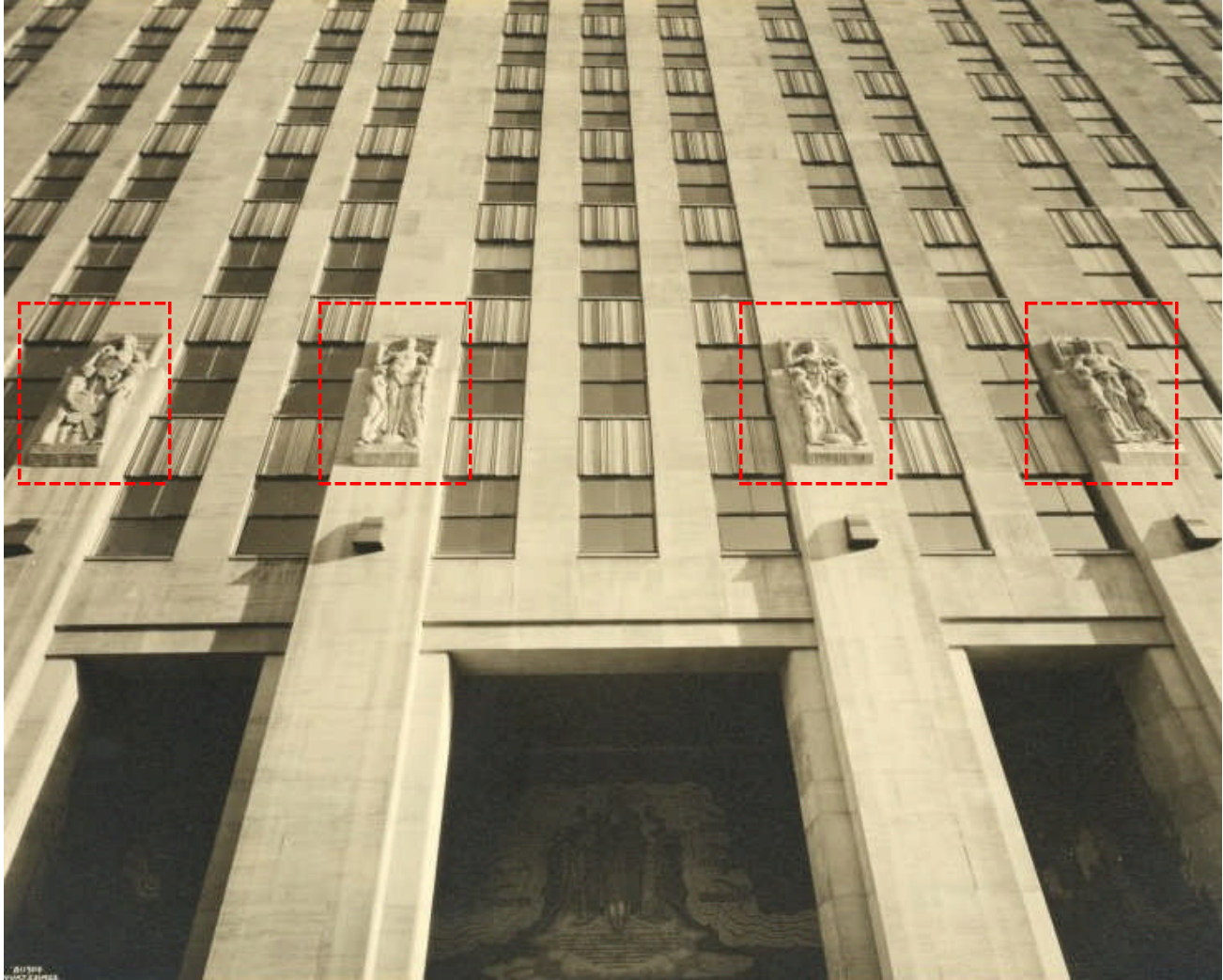
1250 Avenue of the Americas



French born sculptor *Gaston Lachaise* (1882-1935) executed these four bas-relief Indiana limestone panels on the sixth floor facade of *1250 Avenue of the Americas* (a.k.a. *Sixth Avenue*) in 1935. Collectively entitled: “Aspects of Mankind,” each panel measures 11-feet, four-inches high by four-feet wide. These four allegorical stone carvings express ideal aspects of modern civilization, from left to right;

- *Genius Seizing the Light of the Sun* (the development of electricity and communication);
- *The Conquest of Space* and *Gifts of Earth to Mankind* (an acknowledgement to spirituality);
- *The Spirit of Progress* (a reference of the bond between capitalism and the unions during the building of RC)

Unpopular with art critics, Lachaise had the support of *Abby* and *Nelson Rockefeller* who were collectors of the avant-garde artists’ work.

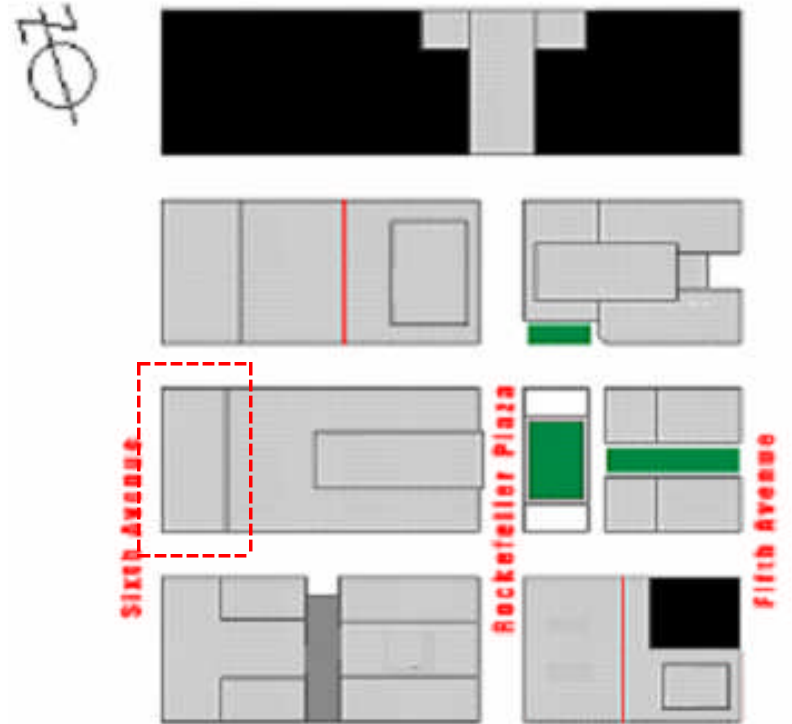




In the loggia of *1250 Avenue of the Americas*, American artist *Barry Faulkner* (1881-1966) executed a glass “Tesserae” mosaic entitled: “*Intelligence Awakening Mankind*” in 1933. Made of over one million small glass tiles (Tesserae) in two-hundred and fifty colors (each hand-cut and set) measuring 79-feet long by 14-feet high. It represents a narrative of the triumph of knowledge over the evil of ignorance. The central figure of thought (intelligence) stands above the world, controlling the action in the mosaic. Two other powerful figures are spoken and written word/s. Other figures symbolize creativity, ideas and intellectual effort. Overall, the message of the mosaic is through the propagation of new knowledge, civilization is advanced.



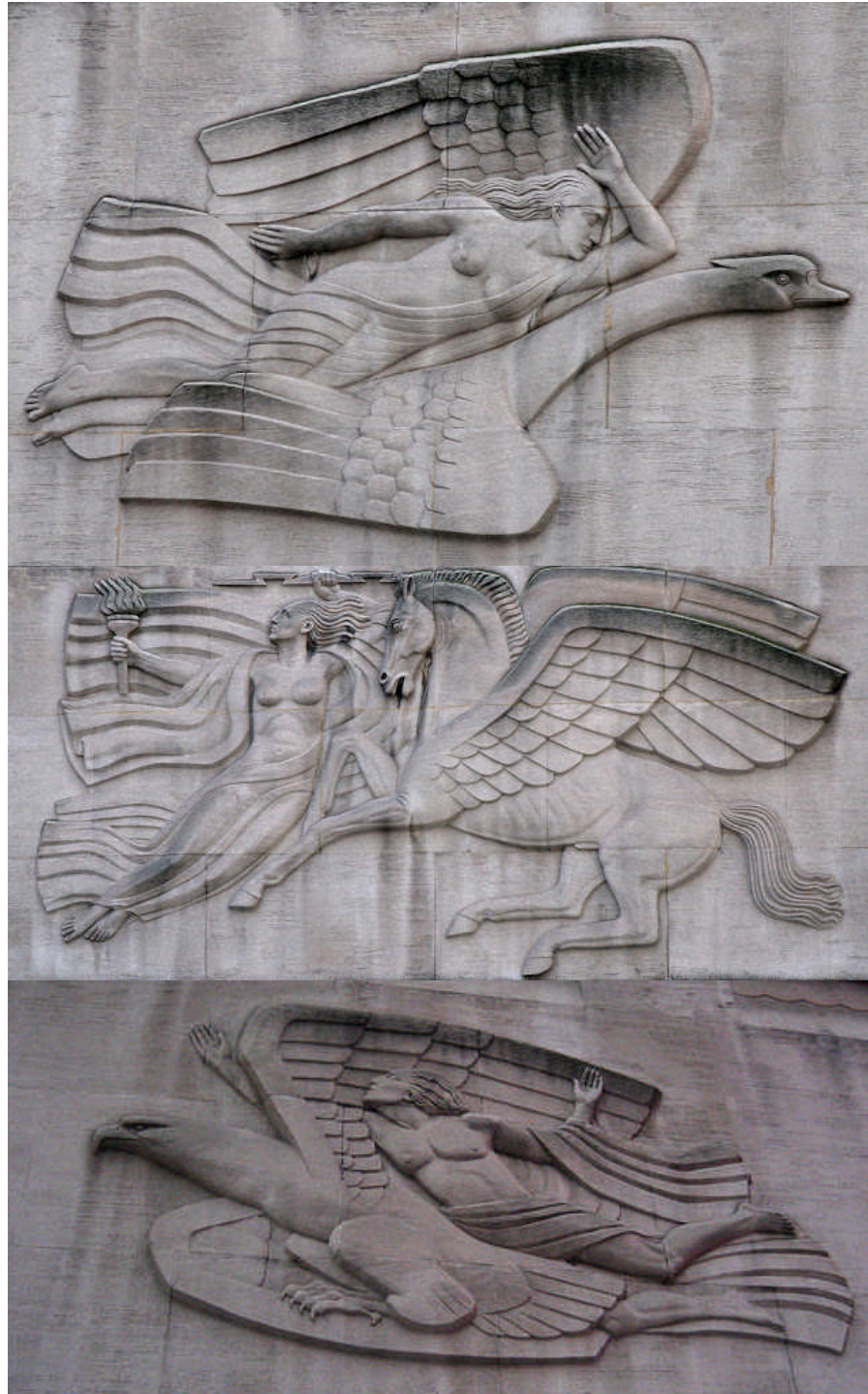




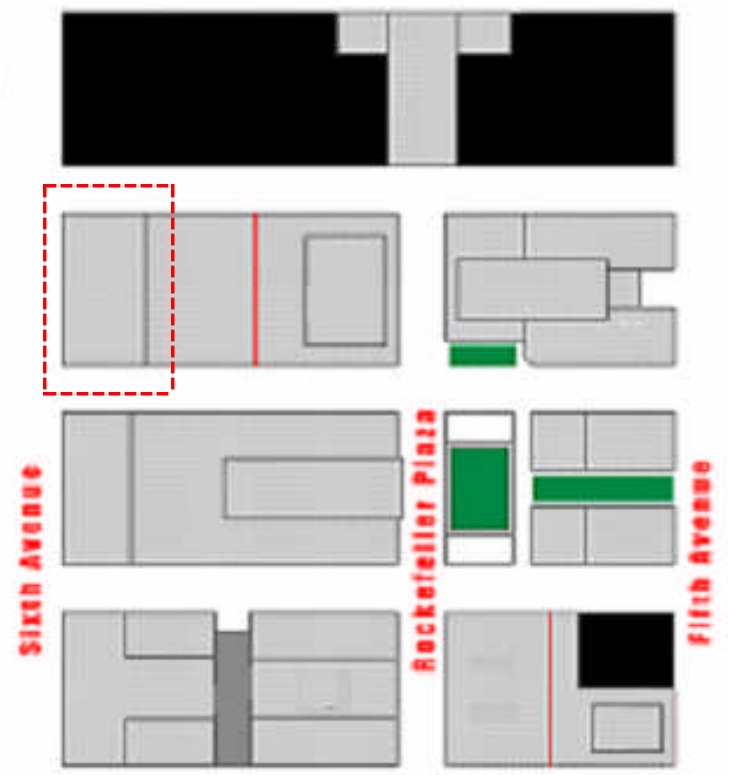
1270 Avenue of the Americas



Above the main entrance and storefront/s of 1270 Avenue of the Americas, American sculptor *Robert Garrison* (1895-1946) executed three large bas-relief limestone panels (each panel is 21-feet long) entitled, collectively (left to right): “Morning, Present, Evening.” Installed in 1932, it was the first work of art commissioned for RC and set the standard for the Art Deco styling of the complex. The three limestone panels are allegories of time evoking radio’s vast reach and ceaseless transmission. Appropriate considering the fact that the first tenant of the building was RCA.







International Building

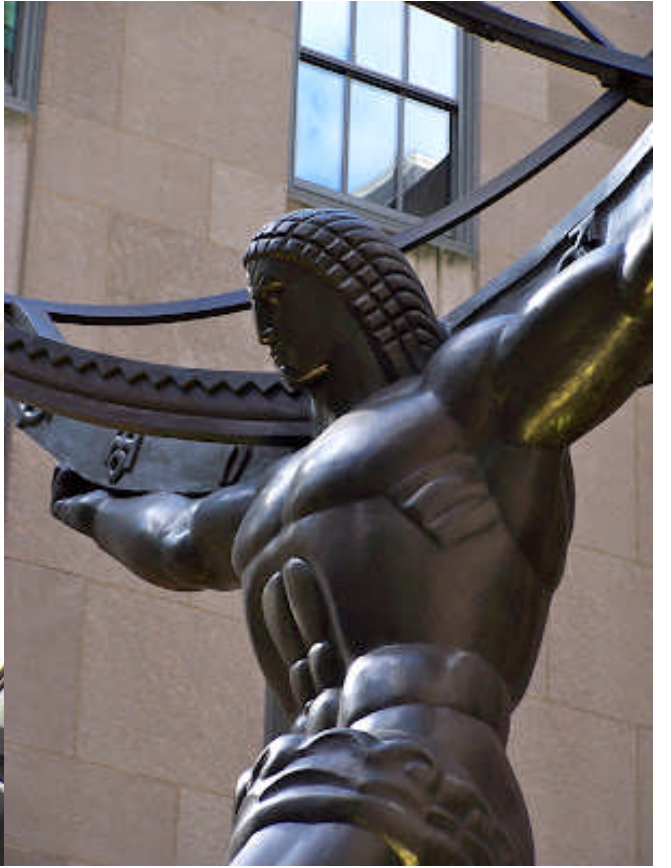


A collaboration between *Lee Lawrie* and French sculptor *Rene Paul Chambellan* (1877-1963), the heroic-sized cast-bronze sculpture (left) entitled: “Atlas” is located in the forecourt of *650 Fifth Avenue* (a.k.a. “International Building”). Resting atop a nine-foot high granite pedestal weighing seven-tons, the figure rises fifteen-feet. Lawrie conceived the idea and designed the figure while Chambellan modeled the Greek mythological figure from Lawrie’s sketches. Half-man, half-god, Atlas was a “Titan” who helped lead a war against the gods of *Olympus*. Defeated, Atlas was condemned to carry the weight of the world upon his shoulders for eternity as punishment. It is one of RC’s greatest Art Deco icons and was the subject of a USPS stamp (above).



ATLAS, ROCKEFELLER CENTER, NEW YORK CITY





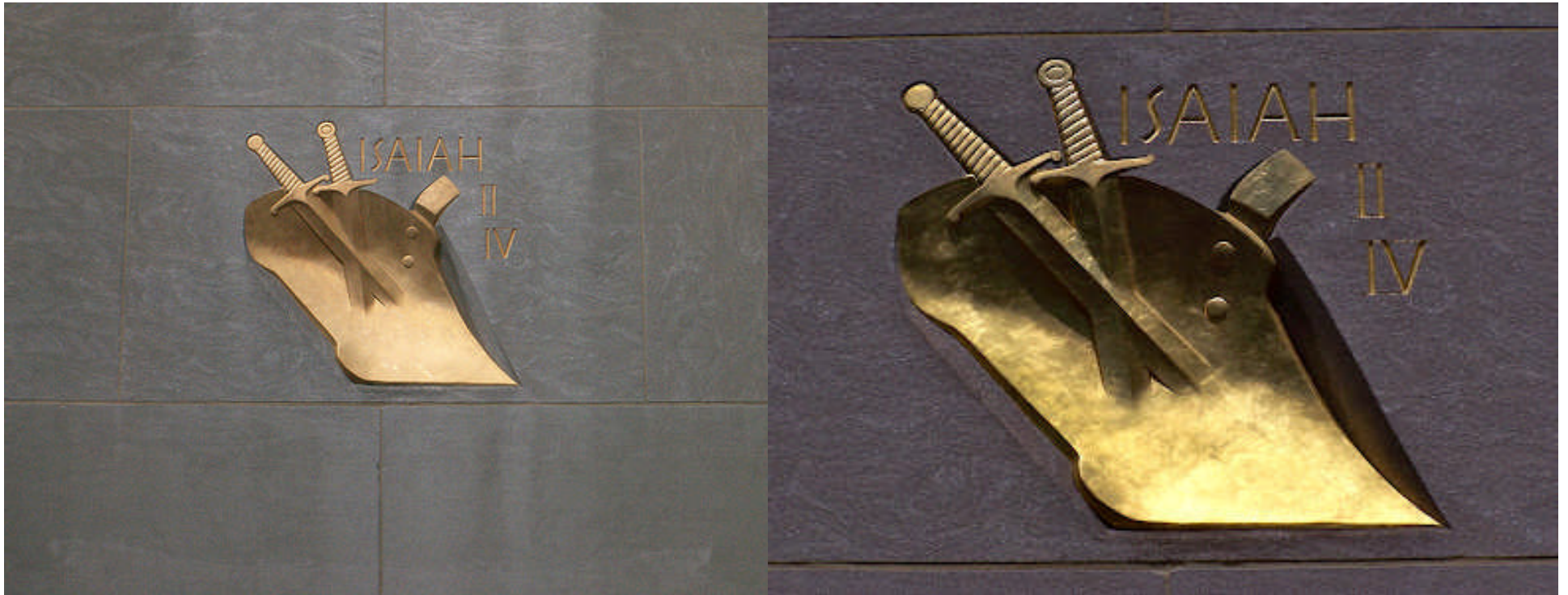




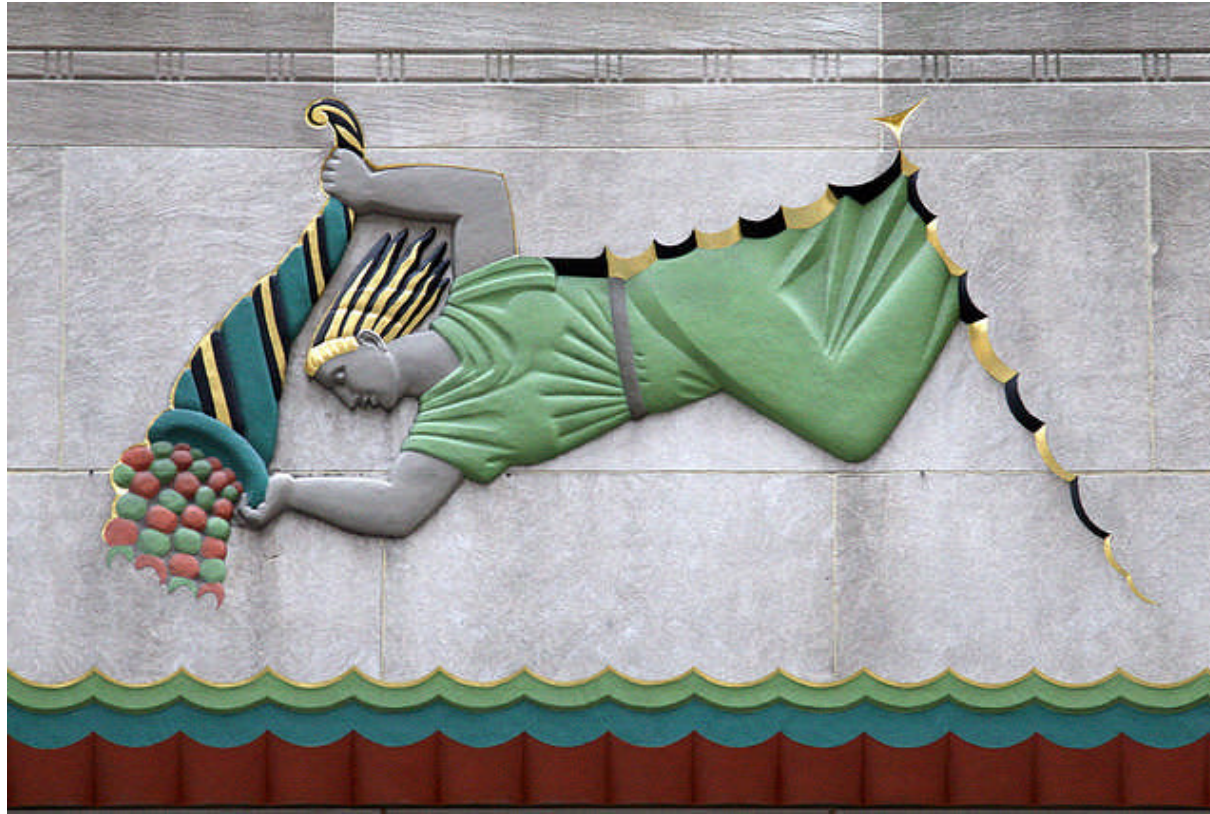




Lee Lawrie created two Intaglio carved limestone bas-relief panels with gilding for the *19 West 50th Street* entrance in 1937. These two panels and his “Swords Into Ploughshares” piece were an appeal for world peace. The allegorical scene at left entitled: “Columbia Greeting a Woman” depicts *Columbia* welcoming an immigrant to the new world: *America*. Columbia wears the cap of a freed Roman slave. The panel at right is entitled: “Boatman Unfurling a Sail.” The figure of a hardworking man standing on a ship represents the means by which his freedom can be attained. Skyscrapers in the background of both panels reinforce the idea of a “new world.”



“Swords Into Ploughshares” by Lee Lawrie (1937) is of Intaglio carving in limestone with gilding and bas-relief. Located at the *19 West 50th Street* entrance, it is the third of the three-part work by Lawrie appealing for world peace. Next to the gilded Intaglio carving of a ploughshare with two crossed swords are the block letters: “Isaiah II:IV” (a reference to the biblical scripture). The bold gold leaf against the grey limestone reinforces the work giving it more authority. “Intaglio” refers to the carving being level with the surface surrounding it.



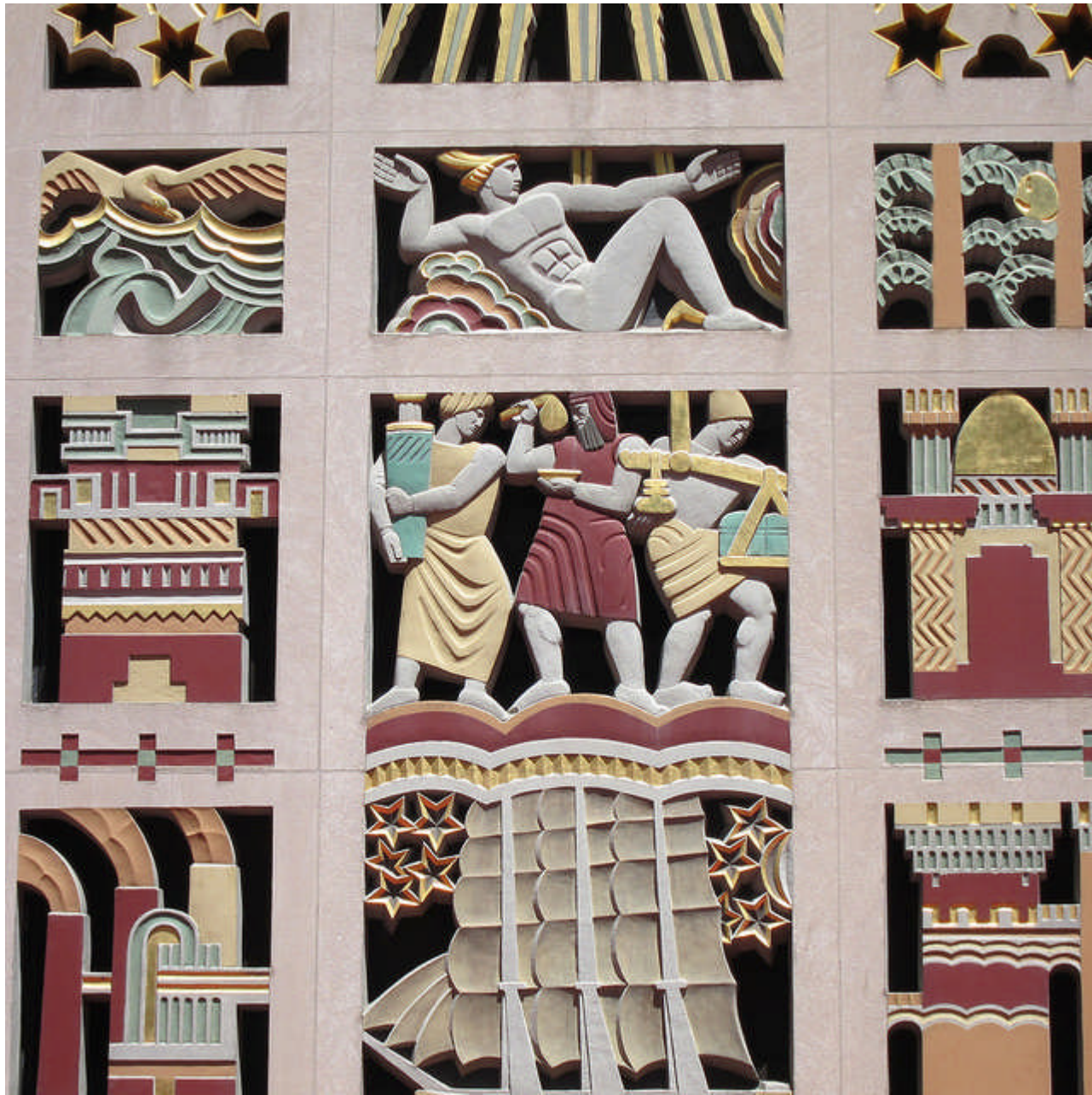
Located above the *10 West 51st Street* entrance, this Intaglio-carved gilded and polychrome painted limestone frieze was executed by *Lee Lawrie* in 1937. Entitled: “Cornucopia of Plenty,” it depicts a messenger soaring from the clouds emptying an overflowing horn onto the earth. Lawrie said it represented the plentitude that would result from international trade; in harmony with the activities of the *International Building* itself. A feeling of motion and energy is conveyed by the figure’s downward angle, flowing golden hair and the spilling of the horn’s contents.

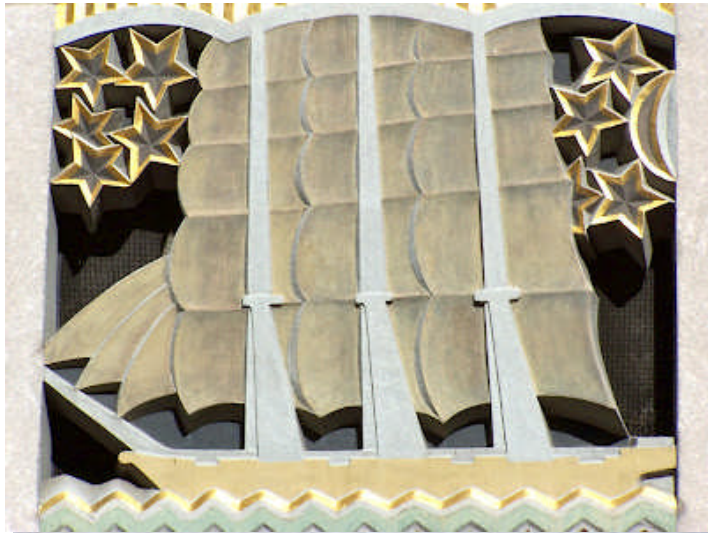


Another work in Intaglio-carved limestone, gilding and polychrome paint by *Lee Lawrie* (1937) for the *International Building*, this figure entitled: “*St. Francis of Assisi With Birds*” is located above the entry at *9 West 50th Street*. The figure of *St. Francis* represents love of self and neighbor. In the year 1212, he founded the *Order of Friars Minor* (a.k.a. “*Franciscans*”) who rejected materialism. In the carving, he wears an austere brown friar’s robe and is bare footed. The gilded doves in flight surrounding his head represent a halo – symbol of his sainthood. He is sharing his meal with a bird while gazing heavenward.



A sculptural grille with the ambitious title: "The Story of Mankind," this work was executed for the entry to the *International Building* at 29 West 50th Street in 1937. It is made of carved limestone with gilding and polychrome paint. *Lawrie* termed the fifteen rectangular spaces that compose the screen "heiroglyphs." It was created to symbolize the purpose of the International Building and chronicle man's progress. The bottom center's four figures (above) represent the races of mankind while the sailing ship directly above represents international trade. A Norman tower symbolizes pre-industry, a lion represents the kingdoms of the world and mercury symbolizes communication. The clock at top and rays below represent the sun.







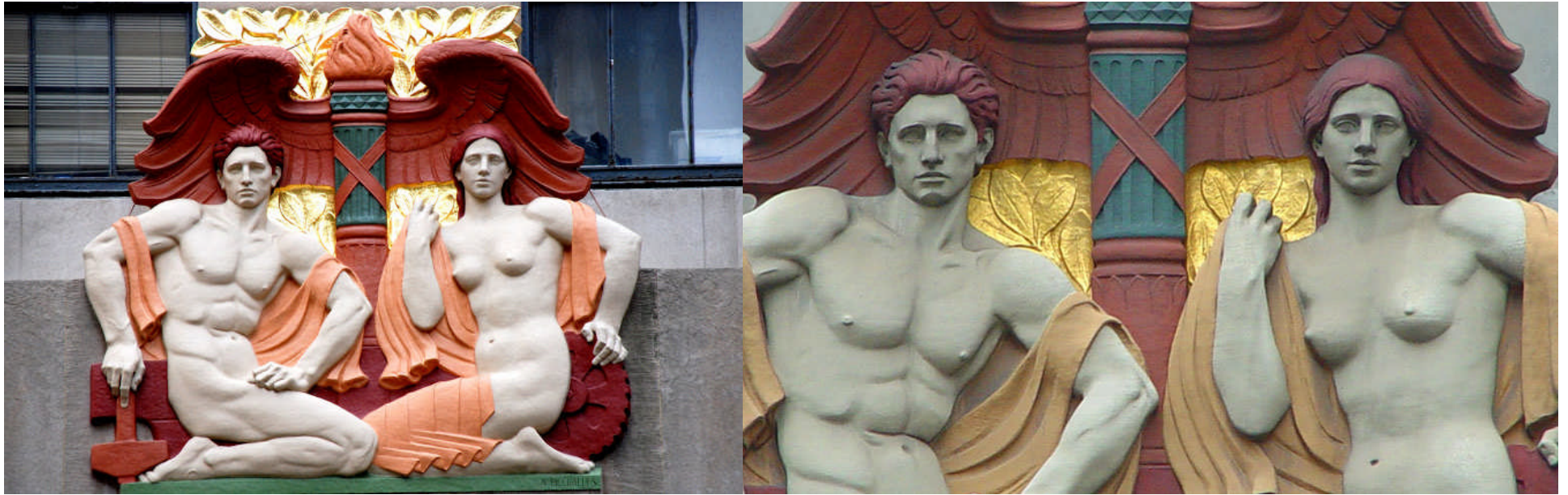
Entitled: “To Commemorate the Workmen of the Center,” by *Gaston Lachaise*, they are two bas-relief limestone panels, each 7-feet high by 12-feet wide, located above the *45 Rockefeller Plaza* entrance. Commissioned as a tribute to labor, these sculptures depict the workmen as heroic, muscular male figures idealizing manual labor and the human form. After he immigrated to *America*, Lachaise abandoned his European training and began artistic explorations of the human body. This included a deep understanding by Lachaise of anatomy and musculature. Lachaise was given a one man man show at the *Museum of Modern Art (MOMA)* in 1935 – the same year the two panels were installed.





310

International Building North



Above the main entrance to 636 *Fifth Avenue* (a.k.a. *International Building North*), *Attilio Piccirilli* executed this cartouche in polychrome painted limestone entitled: “Commerce and Industry with a Cadaceus” in 1936 (it’s located above the glass bas-relief entitled: “Youth Leading Industry”). In this cartouche, two monumental size figures symbolize the basic trades of the nation; the male figure (left) represents commerce while the female figure (right) represents industry. The large “Cadaceus” between the two figures is symbolic of *Mercury* – god of trade.



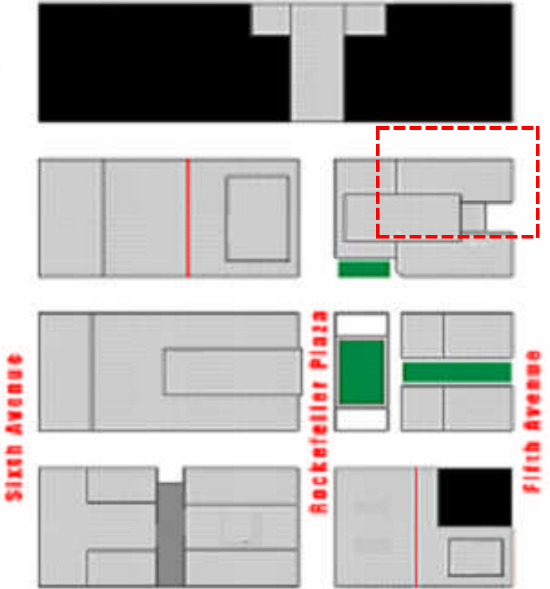
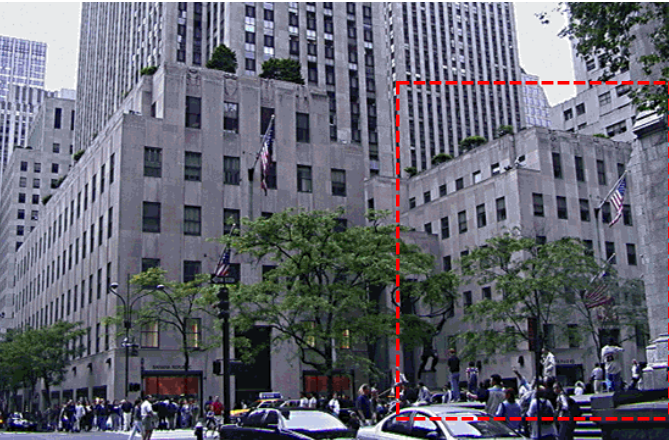
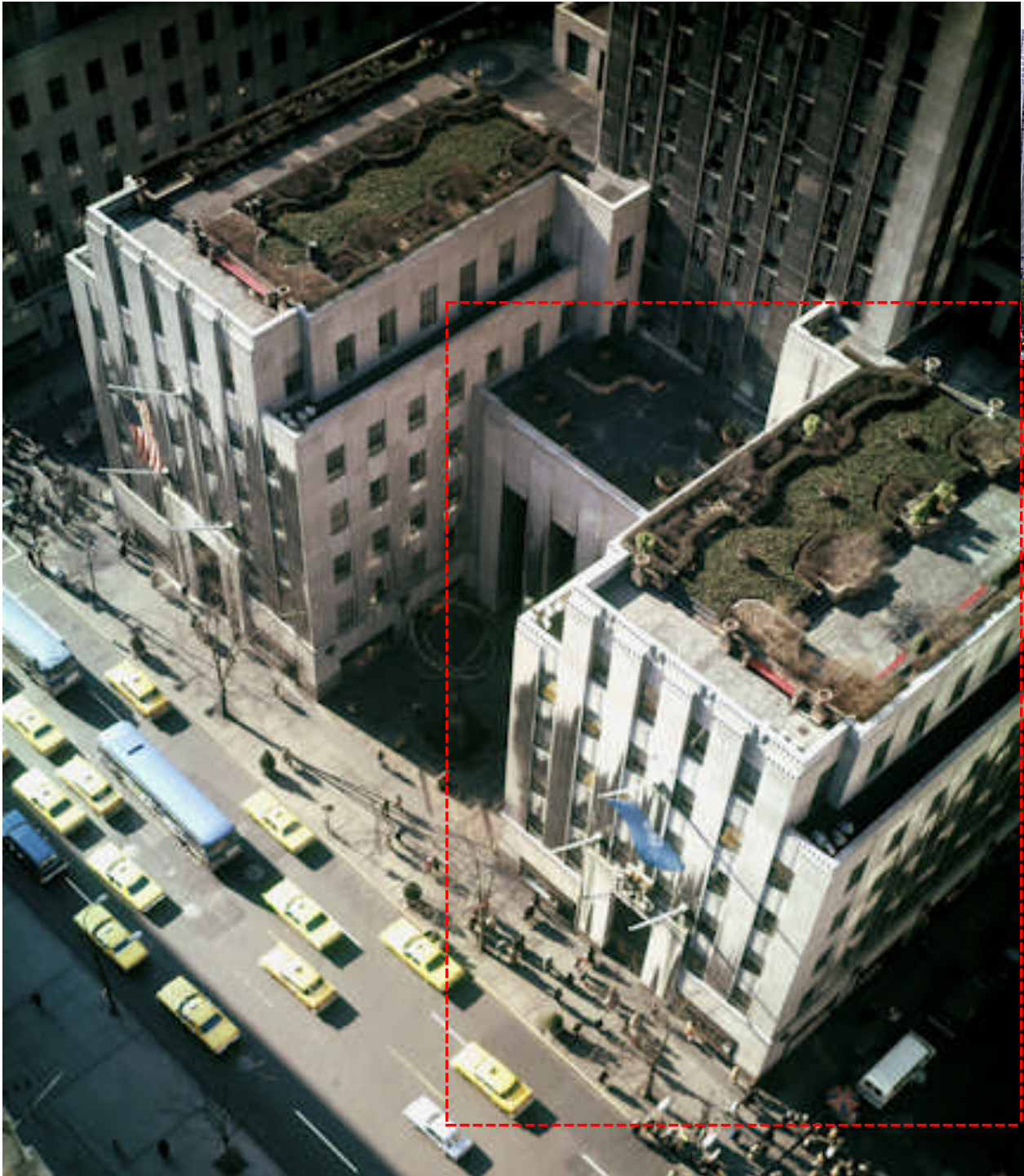


Below “Commerce and Industry” and above the main entrance to 636 *Fifth Avenue* is Attilio Piccirilli’s cast Pyrex glass bas-relief entitled “Youth Leading Industry.” Installed in 1936, it measures 16-feet high by 10-feet wide. The subject matter is a neo-Roman with a typical fascist theme of “youth leading the way.” The work was created to capture the energy of a modern future emerging in Mussolini’s *Italy*. A groundbreaking use of Pyrex glass as an artistic material, it was cast in forty-five blocks. At night, lit from behind, it is even more striking.

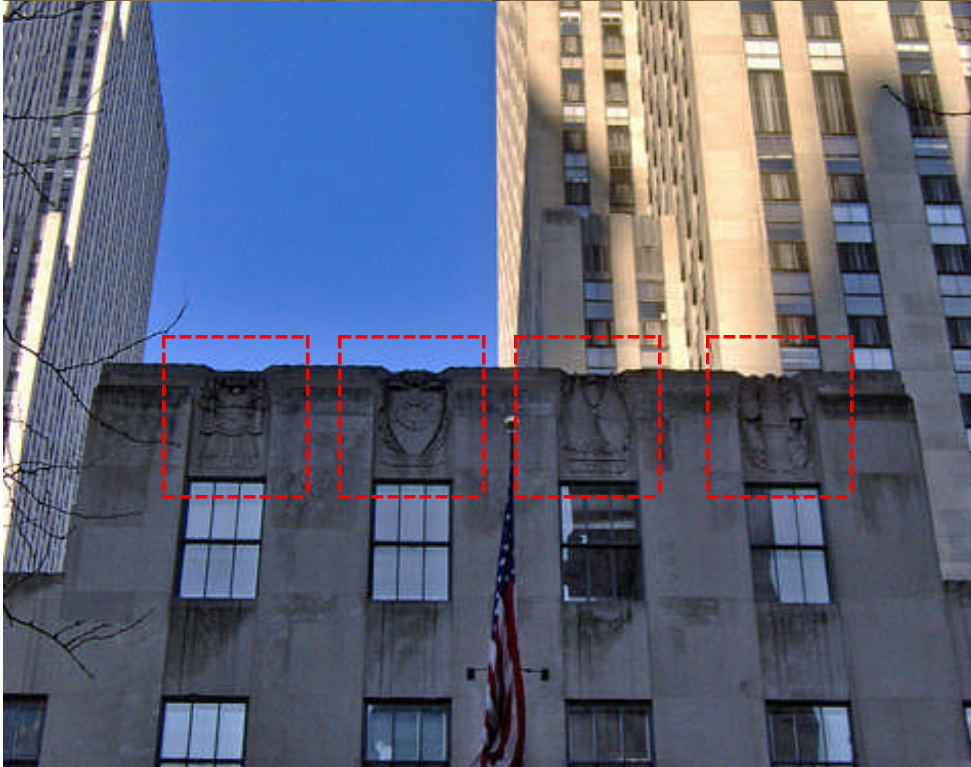




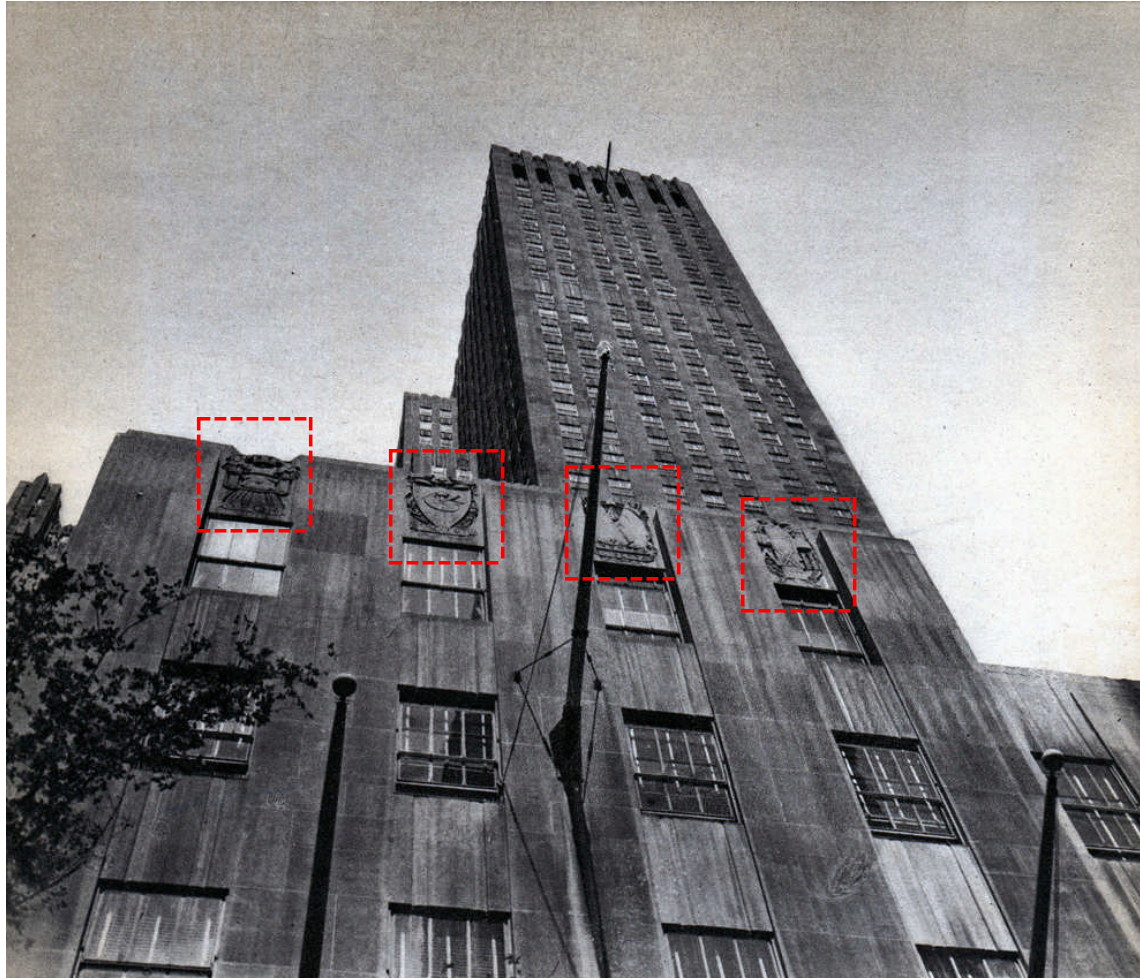
Italian sculptor *Leo Lentelli* (1879-1961) executed these four limestone bas relief panels for the sixth floor facade of 636 *Fifth Avenue* in 1935. The allegorical sculptures represent, from left to right: *Asia*, *Europe*, *Africa* and *The Americas*. They are representative of the international business which takes place in the building. *Asia's Buddha* symbolizes piety and its elephant strength. *Europe's Neptune* and dolphins are symbolic of exploration and trade. *Africa* shows a dignified figure in native dress with an authoritative scepter. *The Americas* is represented by a *Buffalo* head and corn representing *North America* while a *Mayan* head represents *South America*. 316



Palazzo D'Italia



For the flanking (south) portion of 636 *Fifth Avenue* (a.k.a. “Palazzo D’Italia”), *Leo Lentilli* executed four bas-relief limestone panels for the sixth floor facade in 1935 entitled: “Four Periods in Italian History.” From left to right, the first panel represents the Roman period as represented by the letters “SPQR” (“The Senate and People of Rome”) and a figure of a Roman soldier. The next panel represents the *Italian Renaissance* with the numerals “MCCC” (1400) – the recognized year for the beginning of the Italian Renaissance, along with a shield decorated with a pallet and brushes. The third panel represents Italian Independence (1870) with the motto “Death or Liberty” (“Morteo Liberta”) below the two flags. The fourth ³¹⁹ panel represents the fascist regime of *Benito Mussolini*.

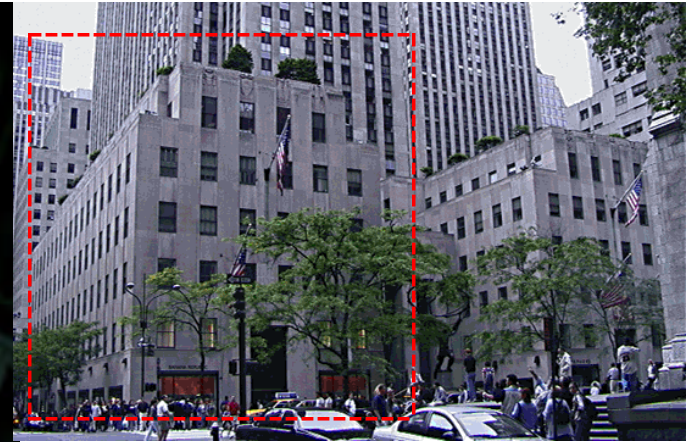
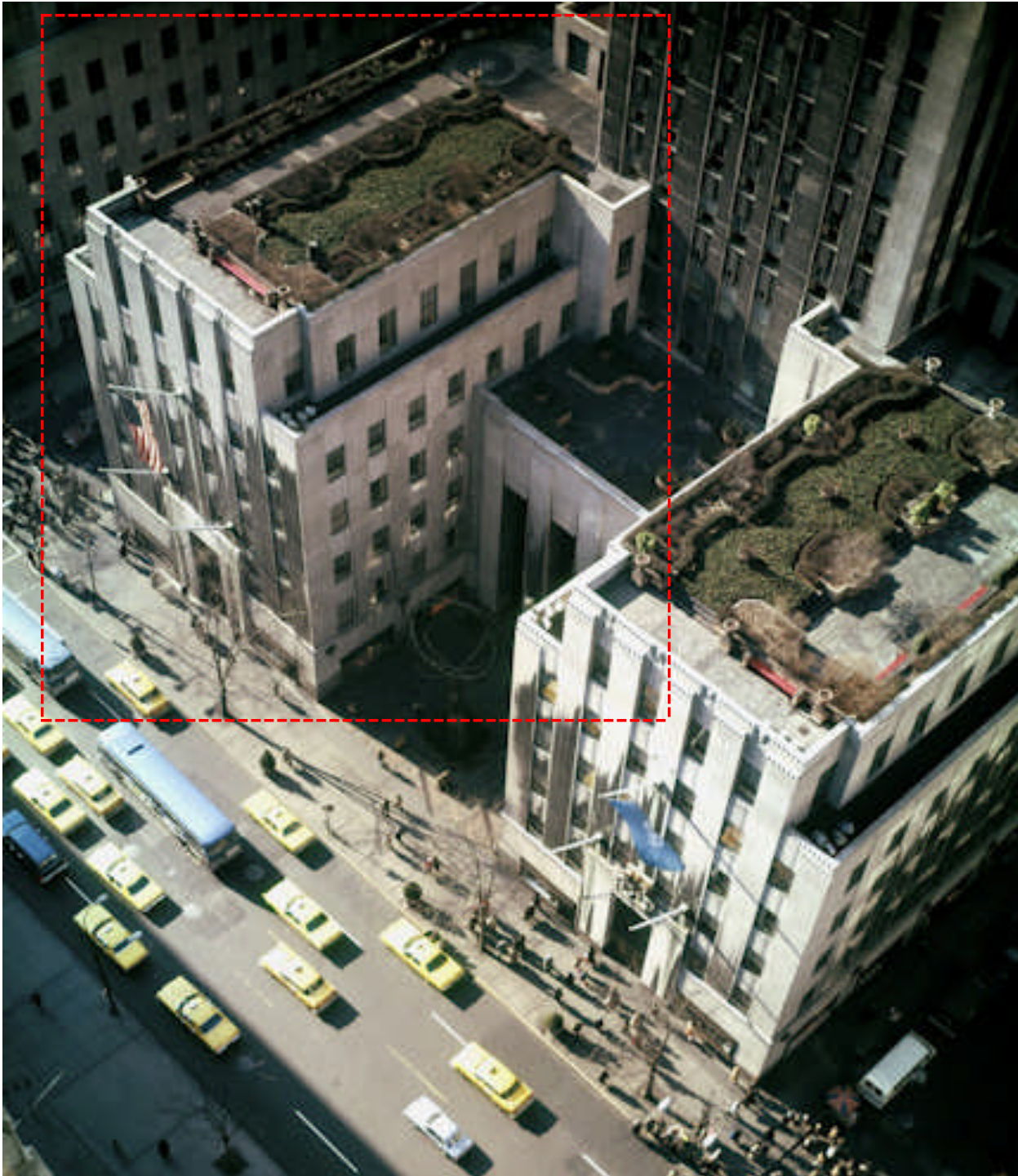




Directly above the entrance to *Palazzo D'Italia*, *Giacomo Manzu* (1908-1994) executed a large (15-foot, 7-inches high by 10-foot, 5-inches wide) cast bronze panel entitled: "Italia" in 1965. It replaced a bas-relief with a fascist theme that was removed during WWII. A group of prominent Italian businessmen presented this panel to RC as a symbol of *Italy* and Italian-Americans. The grapevines, leaves and stalks of wheat are entwined to create a central motif, linked directly to the bold letters spelling out "ITALIA" (Italy).³²¹



A companion work to “Italia” by *Giacomo Manzù* is located near the *West 50th Street* entrance of *626 Fifth Avenue*. Installed in 1965, it is a cast bronze bas-relief measuring 6-feet, 6-inches high by 3-feet wide entitled: “The Immigrant.” Manzù was quoted as saying of the work’s meaning: “*It is the immigrant’s search for two principal things – drinking and eating.*” It depicts a weary barefoot mother and her naked child, representing poverty. The woman represents Italian women who, in the tragic aftermath of WWII, left *Italy* to find a new life and beginning in *America*.



La Maison Francaise



Located above the main entrance to *610 Fifth Avenue* (a.k.a. “*La Maison Francaise*”), *Alfred Janniot* (1889-1969) executed this large gilded cast-bronze bas-relief panel (18-foot high by 11-feet wide) in 1934 entitled: “*Friendship Between America and France.*” The work reads as a narrative from top to bottom. The two figures at top holding hands symbolize the alliance between *Paris* (left) and *New York* (right). The three female figures below represent the “*Three Graces*” – *Poetry*, *Beauty* and *Elegance* (the cultural exchange between the two nations). The winged mythological horse (lower left) represents inspiration and imagination. The work is of a classical nature rather than the more typical Art Deco style found in much of RC’s artwork.

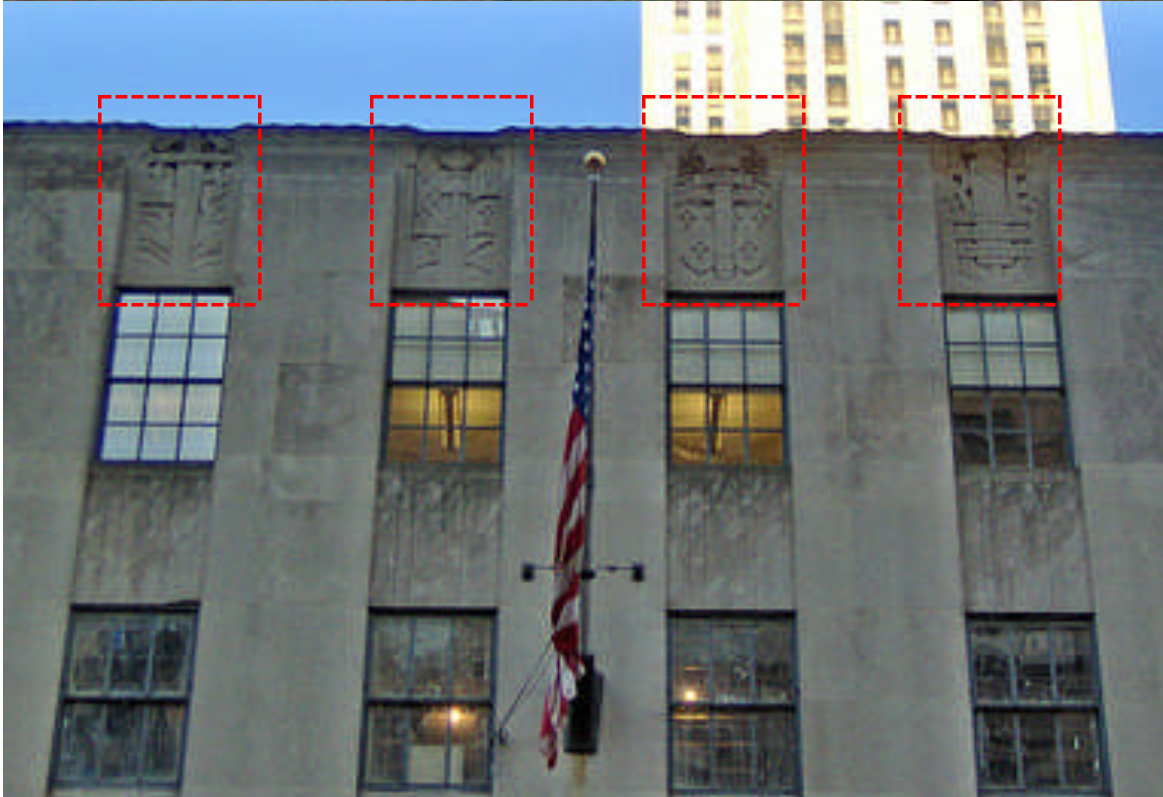






Located directly above “Friendship Between America and France” is *Alfred Janniot’s* polychrome and gilded carved limestone Cartouche entitled: “Gallic Freedom” (1934). It measures 10-feet high by 11-feet wide symbolizing French freedom with the words: *Liberte, Egalitee* and *Fraternite* (Liberty, Equality and Fraternity). The female figure holds a gilded torch of revolution and triumph in her left hand while the twisted pose and strong details are typical of Janniot’s style. Unlike *Friendship* below, it’s in keeping with RC’s Art Deco style. ³²⁸



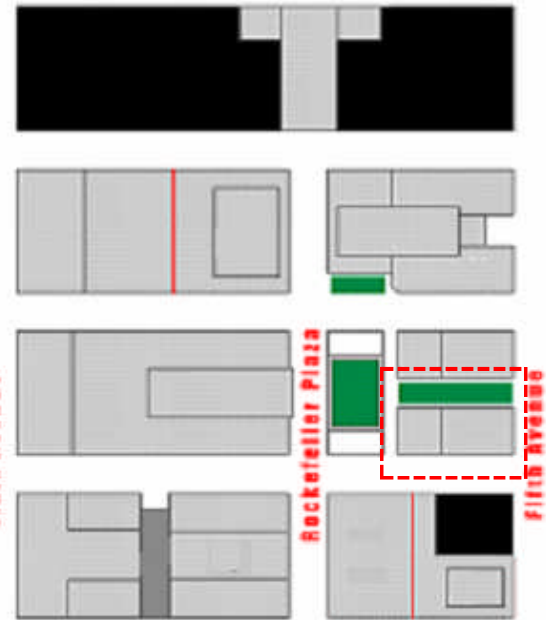


Four bas-relief limestone panels by *Rene Paul Chambellan* entitled: “Pageant of French History” (1934) adorn the sixth floor facade of *La Maison Francaise*. They symbolize four significant events in French history, from the left to right; the Roman period (sword), a New United France (five spears), absolute monarchy established under *Louis XIV* (crown atop a torch) and the *French Republic* (letters “RF”- *Republic Francaise* - and three symbols for unity, freedom and victory).



Above the *Channel Gardens* entrance to *La Maison Francaise* is Lew Lawrie’s Intaglio carved relief in limestone with gilding and polychrome paint entitled: “Seeds of Good Citizenship” (1937). The height of Art Deco styling, it features a muscular and robust allegorical gilded female figure sowing seeds in the form of a stylized fleur-de-lis; the symbolic flower of *France*. She wears the helmet of authority and the dress of a peasant woman thus underscoring her connection with the ordinary people. She appears to stride across a gilded, multi-colored field while effortlessly carrying her burden of seeds in a heavy sack.





The British Empire Building



Above the main entrance to *620 Fifth Avenue* (a.k.a. “*The British Empire Building*”) is a large (18-feet high by 11-feet wide) high-relief cast bronze panel with gilding executed by *Carl Paul Jennewein* in 1933 entitled: “*Industries of the British Empire.*” It features nine gilded allegorical figures representing major industries of the *British Empire*. Unemotional and idealized, they represent ; coal, fish, salt, tobacco and sugar. *Australia* is represented by wool, *Canada* by wheat and *Africa* by cotton. A stylized sculpted sun is symbolic of the saying: “The sun never sets on the British Empire.”





Above “Industries of the British Empire” is a limestone cartouche with gilding and polychrome-paint depicting the royal coat of arms of *Great Britain*. The motto: “Dieu et Mon Droit” appears on a scroll beneath the shield of the coat of arms. The motto is French for: “God and My Right.” It was first used by *King Richard the Lionhearted* as a battle cry and subsequently adopted by *King Henry V* as the official royal motto of *England*.

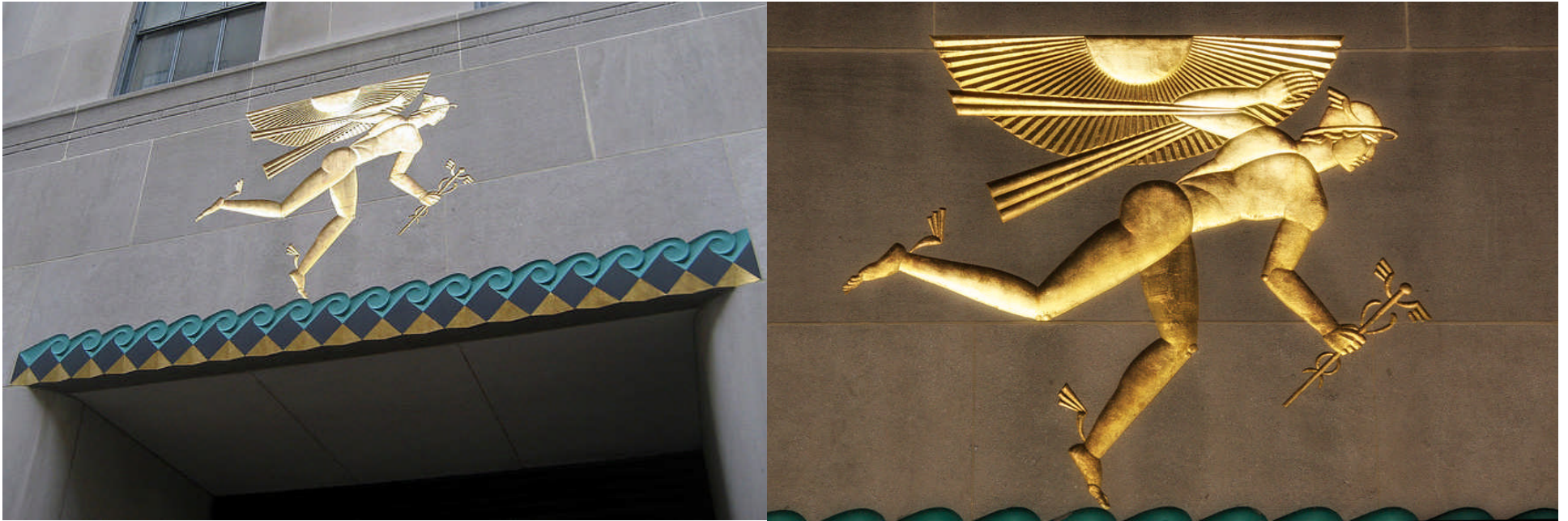


Above the *West 50th Street* entrance to *620 Fifth Avenue* Lew Lawrie executed an Intaglio relief in limestone with gilding and polychrome paint entitled: “Arms of England” (1933). Three gilded *passant* (walking) *gardant* (looking out) lions signify the building’s main tenant – the British crown. *King Richard I* (a.k.a. “Richard the Lionhearted”) ruled *England* from 1189-1199 and was the first to use lions on his shield. Gilded Tudor roses carved below the lions are symbolic of British royalty.





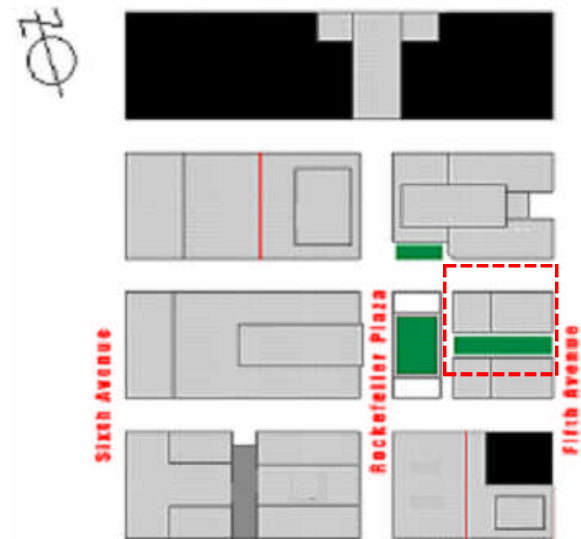
Adorning the sixth floor facade of *620 Fifth Avenue* are four bas-relief limestone panels executed by *Rene Paul Chambellan* entitled: “Motifs from the Coat of Arms of the British Isles.” Installed in 1933, Chambellan borrowed motifs from the coats of arms of *Wales, England, Scotland, and Ireland*. From left to right: *Wales* is a mighty dragon; *England* is a lion and large Tudor rose; *Scotland* is a Unicorn and oversized thistle and *Ireland* is a stag with harp and shamrock



Prominent above the *Channel Gardens* entrance to *620 Fifth Avenue* is Lew Lawrie's gilded and polychrome paint Intaglio limestone relief entitled: "Winged Mercury" (1933). Used as a symbol of the strength of the British Empire in the 1930s, *Mercury* was used by Lawrie to depict the Roman god on a mission flying over blue-green waves. His helmet symbolizes power and protection while the wings on his heels represent swiftness. Overall, the work represents the wealth and vitality of the British merchant fleets that sailed the seven seas and built the empire upon which the sun never set, as represented by the sun and rays above the figure. It is a fine example of the Art Deco style at RC.



BRITISH EMPIRE BUILDING MCMXXXII





“Symbols in stone and steel of the common interests and good will of three great powers”

John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

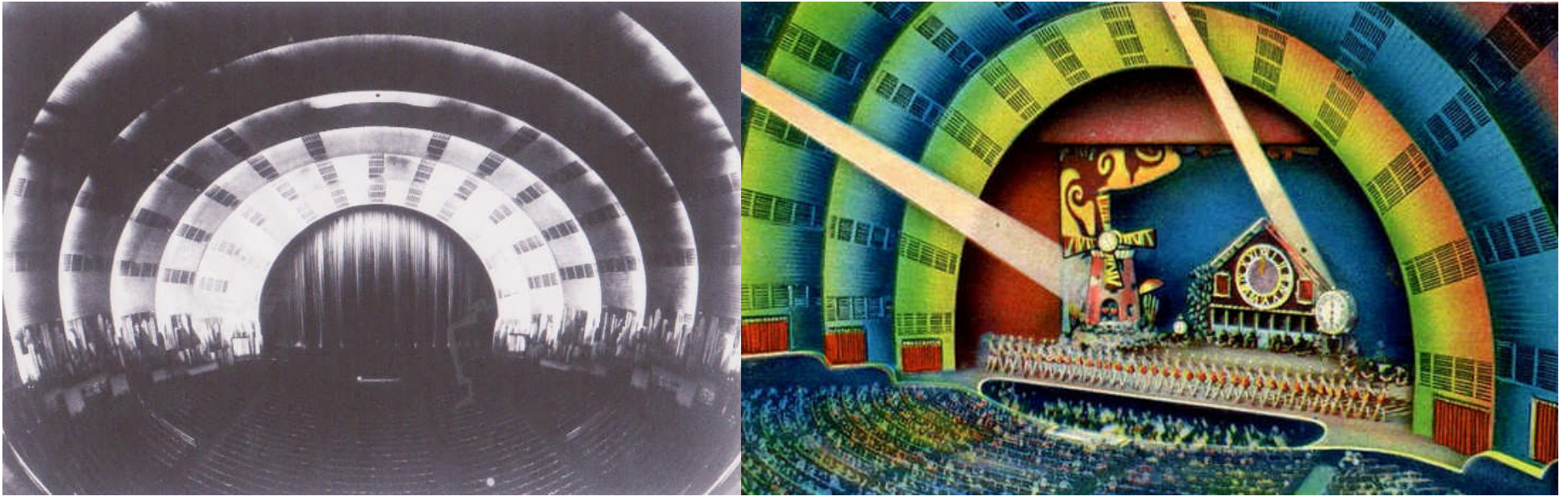
Above: plaque commemorating the laying of the cornerstone for the *British Empire Building* on June 2nd 1932. Both the *British Empire Building* and *La Maison Francaise* were the beneficiaries of a special act of *Congress* that made the warehouses below them “free ports”; goods could be imported, stored and displayed duty-free with taxes payable only upon sale.



Part 5

Showplace of the Nation

Soul Satisfying

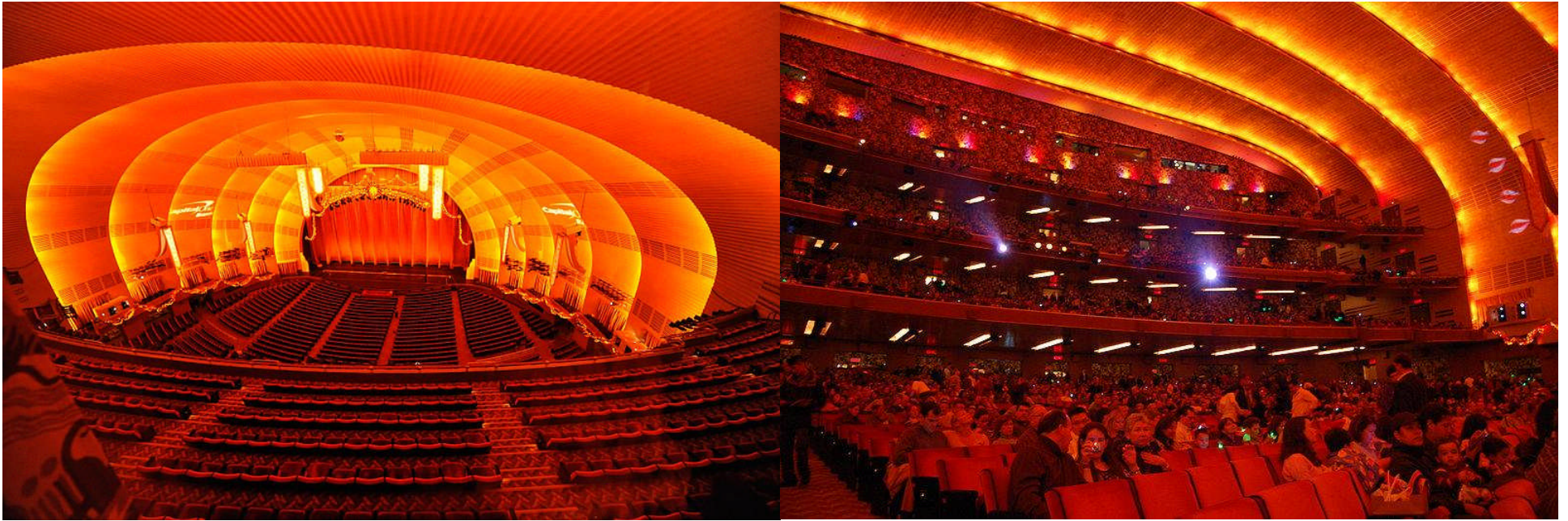


“The great auditorium is beautiful, soul-satisfying, inspiring beyond anything I have dreamed possible”

John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

Left: caption: “Radio City Music Hall Entertainment Center’s Auditorium. The most striking feature of the theatre auditorium is an immense proscenium arch, sixty-feet in height. The semi-circular design is a stylized representation of a sunrise, and can be lighted in eight different colors.”

Right: caption (postcard): “Interior Radio City Music Hall, Rockefeller Center, New York”



On December 27th 1932, *Radio City Music Hall* opened its doors for the first time. At first, it was planned to be named: “International Music Hall,” but with the major tenant of RC being the *Radio Corporation of America* (RCA) and the complex referred to as a “Radio City,” the name was attached to the music hall thus it became known as: “Radio City Music Hall” (RCMH). It soon earned the nickname: “Showplace of the Nation.” After passing through the restrained black marble ticket lobby, visitors enter the sixty-foot high *Grand Foyer* illuminated with crystal chandeliers, tall bronzed glass mirrors and Ezra Winter’s ambitious mural entitled: *The Foundation of Youth*. The lower lobby features black mirrored columns, club chairs by noted American deco designer *Donald Deskey* and murals by *Louis Bouche*. Designed by Deskey, the circular first mezzanine ladies’ lounge employed angled mirrors and round vanity stools to echo the choreographic intricacies of *Busby Berkeley*. This was but a prelude to the enormous 6K-seat auditorium, whose ceiling; consisting of 180-degree arcs of light curving down to the floor, was inspired by a sunset *Samuel Roxy Rothafel* - the music hall’s impresario, had viewed from the stern of an ocean liner. To add the effect of a sunset at sea, the auditorium carpet was designed in a pattern of swimming fish. The interior of RCMH was designated a NYC landmark in 1978. Architect *Edward Durell Stone* designed the building while Deskey was responsible for interior design in the Art Deco style of the day.

Left: auditorium and stage

Right: auditorium and balconies





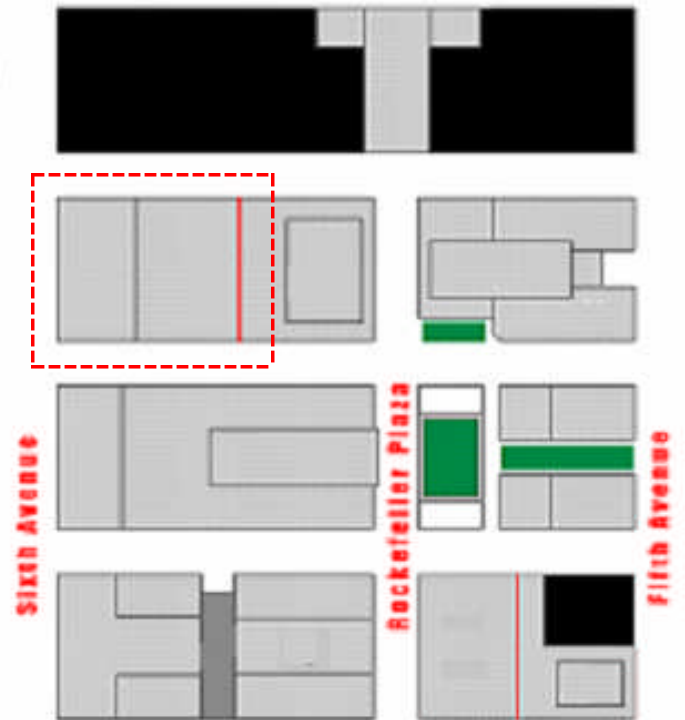
Above & Left: front and side views of the Music Hall's Proscenium Arch, stage and auditorium





Above: caption: “Radio City Music Hall. ‘Rockettes’ 1939”

Left T&B: caption: “Rockettes performing on Rockefeller Center Day, 1939 New York World’s Fair.” RC had come full circle by 1939 with the completion of the *U.S. Rubber Company Building*. In the course of the “last rivet” ceremony, Mayor *Fiorello LaGuardia* asked *J.D. Rockefeller, Jr.* to create a few more centers around the city. From the RCA studios in the heart of RC, Americans heard comedian *Jack Benny* play his violin with superb incompetence.





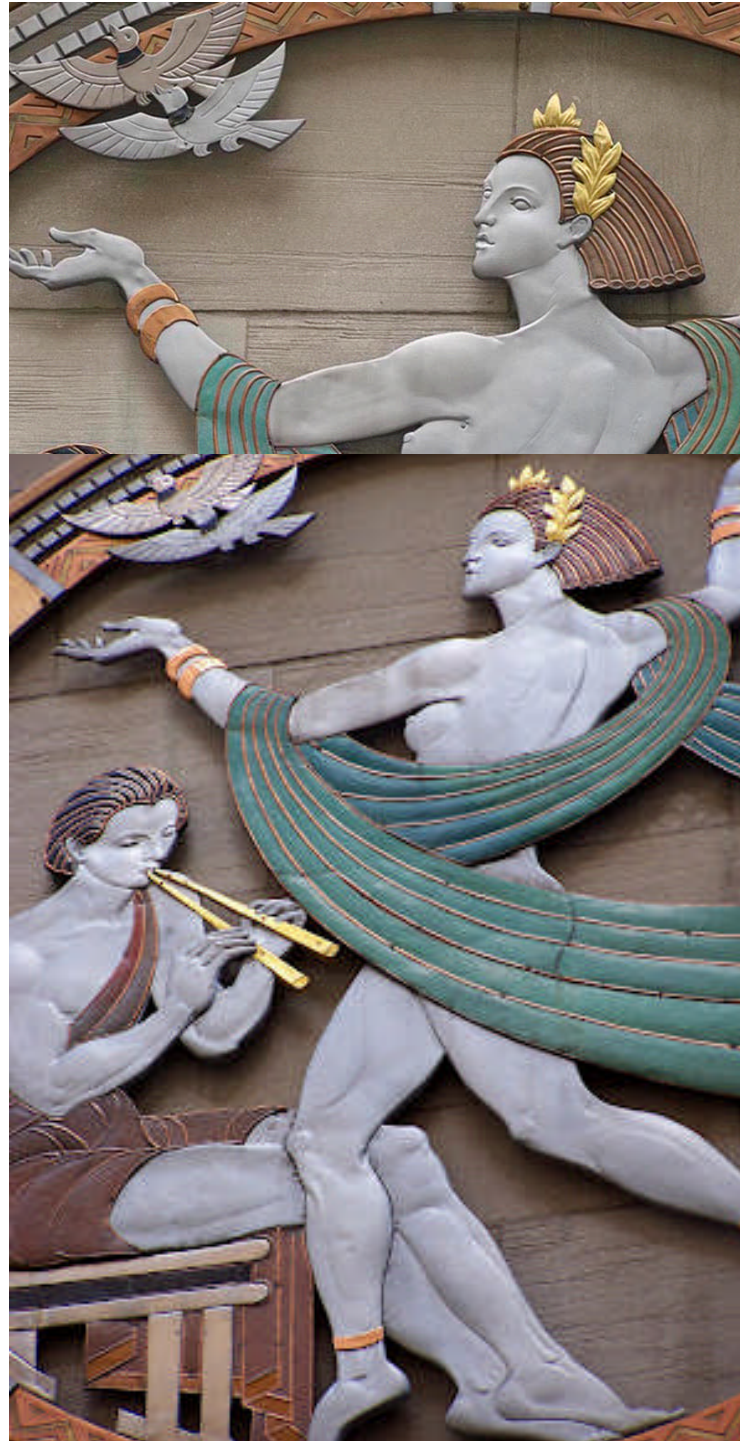




Located on the *West 50th Street* facade of RCMH are three eighteen-foot diameter plaques made of carbon steel, chrome-nickel steel, copper, aluminum, vitreous enamel, gold and silver gilding. Entitled “Dance, Drama, and Song,” they were placed high up on the south-facing facade and represent the theater’s main activities. The work was a collaboration between sculptor/muralist *Hildreth M. Meiere* and metalworker extraordinaire *Oscar B. Bach*.







44 — SCENE OUTSIDE RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL, N. Y. C.





“Acts from Vaudeville” by *Rene Paul Chambellan* are six cast bronze “openwork” plaques located below the RCMH marquee (on the granite wall above the 1260 Avenue of the Americas entrance). Each playful plaque was an introduction to the stage events and an architectural decoration. Each one represents typical early 20th Century ethnic Vaudeville performances. From top left to bottom left:

- Russian minstrels and gypsy dancer;
- Black banjo players and tap dancer;
- German accordionist and saxophonist

From top right to bottom right:

- Rockettes;
 - French cellist and female violinist;
 - Jewish drummer and dancer
- Chambellan was also commissioned to model nearly all the architectural details of RC including grilles, handrails, moldings etc.



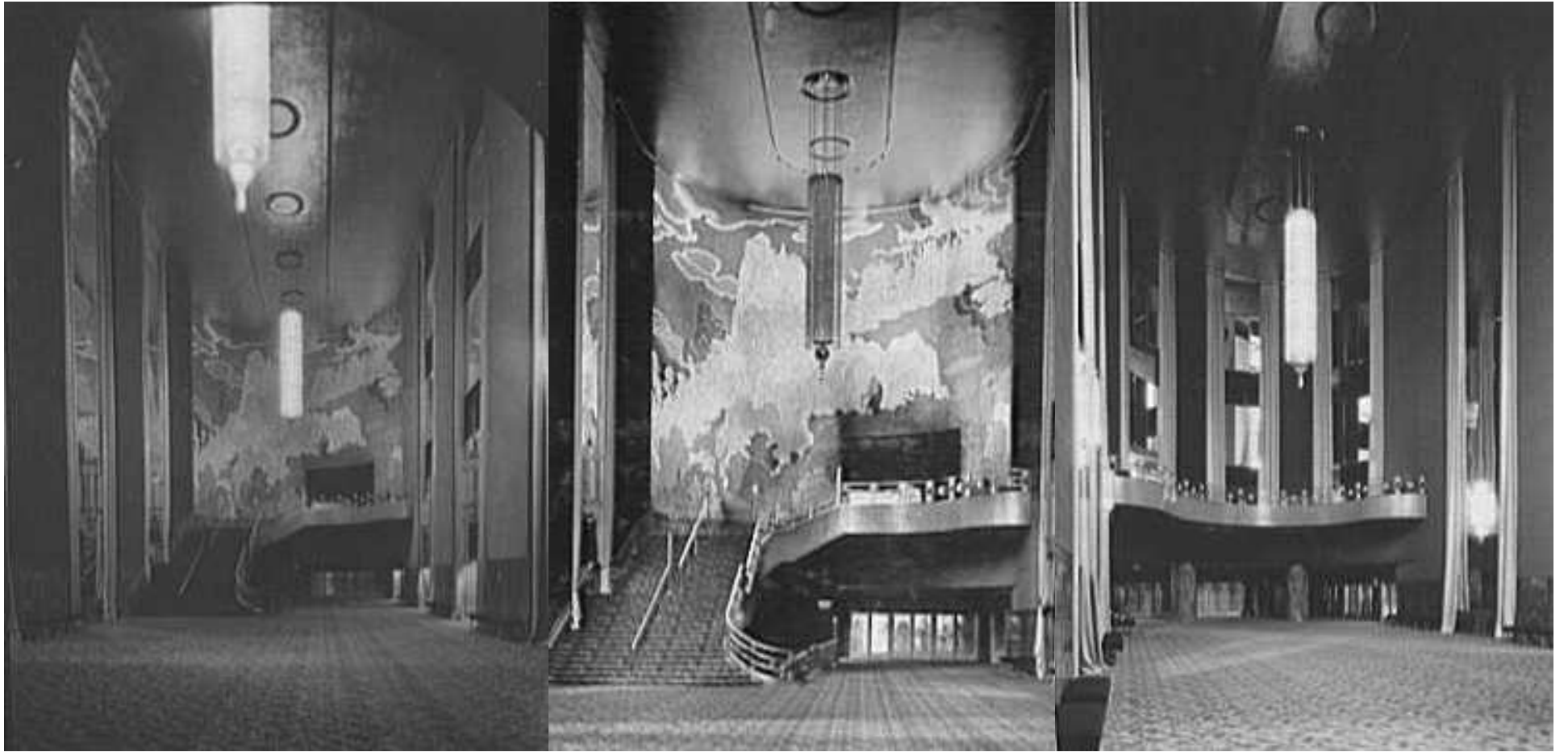


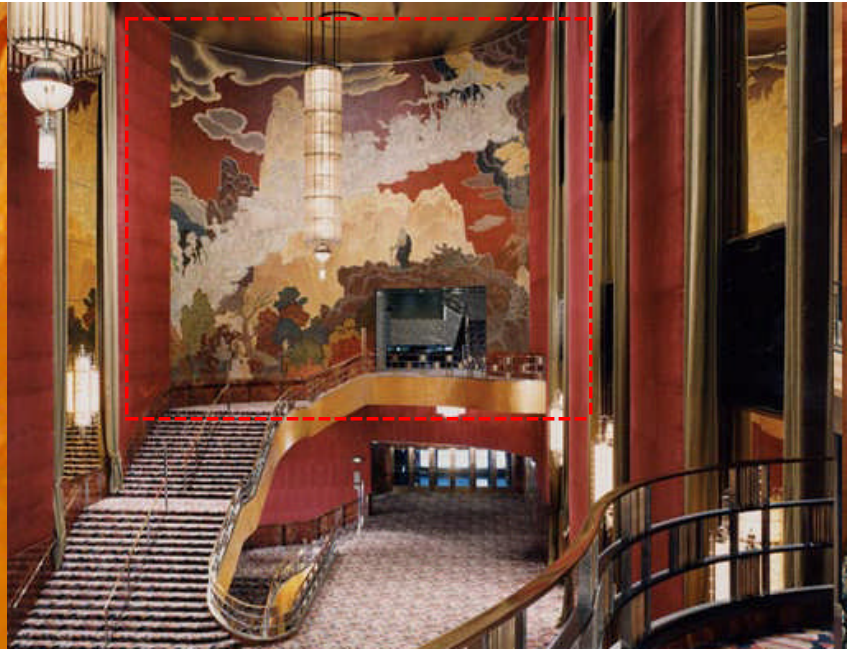


Donald Deskey's designs included glass, aluminum, chrome and leather for the decoration of the theater's walls, carpets, light fixtures and furniture. His work borrowed heavily from the "European Modern" aesthetic style of which he was the foremost practitioner in the *United States*, at the time.

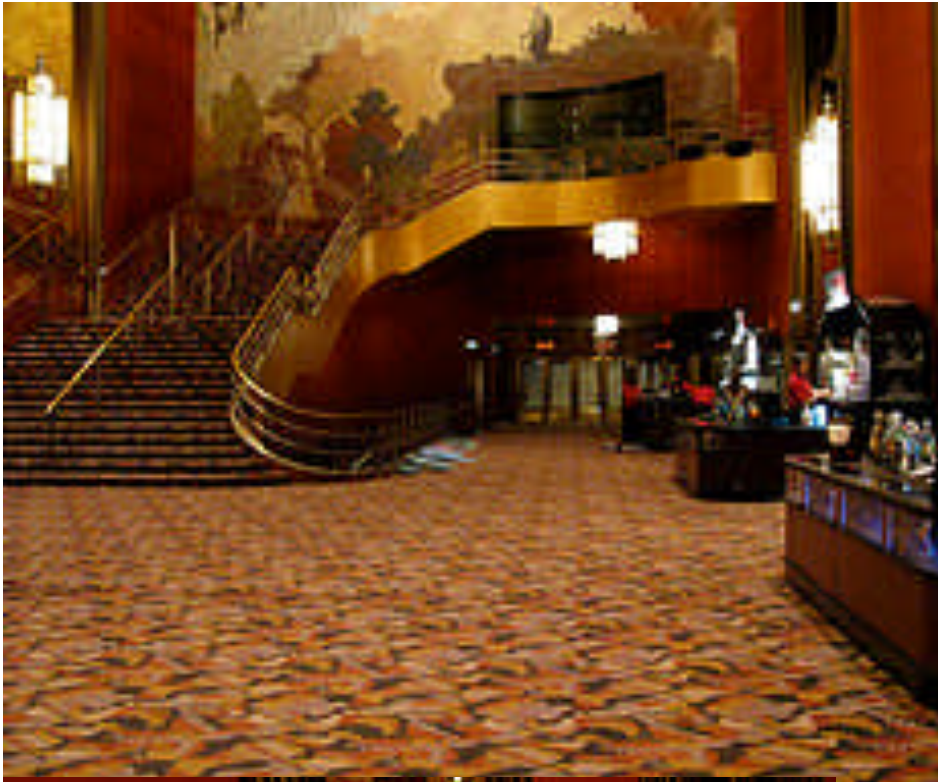
Left: *Grand Foyer*

Right: "The Roxy Suite" (a.k.a. "VIP Room")





Located on a curvilinear wall of the main staircase (above) from the *Grand Foyer* to the *First Mezzanine* is a large mural entitled "The Fountain of Youth" by *Ezra Winter* (1886-1966). An oil-on-canvas, it measures 40-feet wide by 60-feet high and was installed in 1932. The mural depicts a legend from the *Oregon* native-American tribe about the beginning of time when the world was new. Winter was an excellent colorist and it shows in his use of dark reds, lush greens and golden tones creating a dreamlike effect (left).



Above L&R: the highly ornate carpet of the *Grand Foyer* features twelve musical instruments
Left: overhead view of the *Balcony Bar*

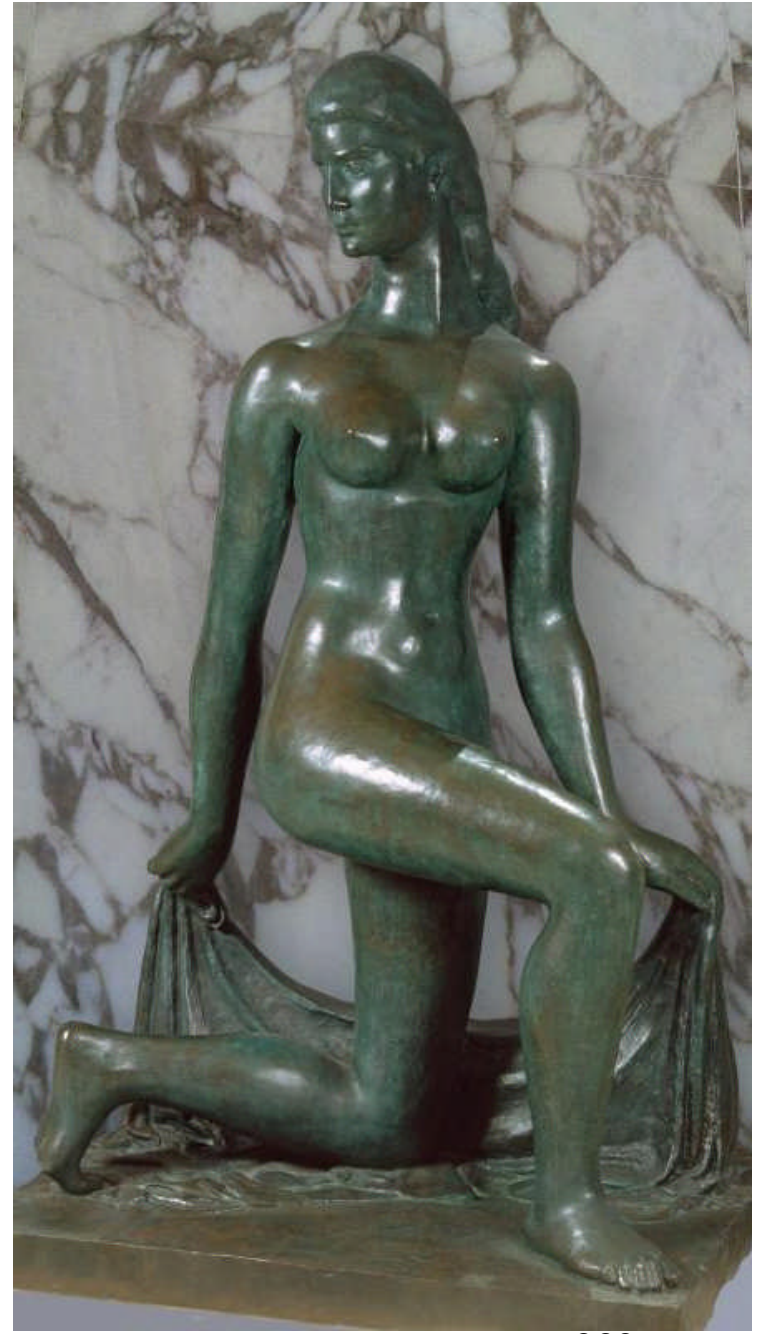




Three female cast aluminum nudes were commissioned for the RCMH. However, *Roxy Rothafel* felt that they were inappropriate for a family venue and a controversy ensued (*Abby* and *Nelson Rockefeller* admired the sculptures). The only one that was displayed on opening night was “Goose Girl” (top) by American sculptor *Robert Laurent* (1890-1970). The girl and goose were meant to reflect humanity and nature. The piece is set against a tinted mirrored wall, reflecting the back of the pale grey sculpture in warm golden brown tones. A circular mirror on an opposing wall (bottom) also reflects the image. Deskey wanted to make going to RCMH a cultural as well as an entertainment experience for RCMH patrons with the inclusion of such works of art.



Since opening night, the other two cast aluminum sculptures have been on display at RCMH. “Eve” (Left) by *Gwen Lux* (1908-1987) portrays the biblical Eve from an evolutionary point-of-view and is displayed in the southwest corner of the *Grand Foyer*. “Spirit of the Dance” (right) by *William Zorach* (1887-1966) is on display in the *Grand Lounge*. It portrays a dancer taking a bow and was widely praised by art critics and the public-at-large in 1932 when it debuted.





Each of the public restrooms have adjoining lounges that display various works of art. Artists *Stuart Davis*, *Witold Gordon*, *Edward Ulrich*, *Henry Billings* and *Donald Deskey* and others have art displayed in these lounges. *Georgia O'Keeffe* was commissioned to paint a mural for the Second Mezzanine Lady's Lounge. However, for reasons unknown, she never completed the mural.

Left: mural by *Stuart Davis* in Men's Room

Right: untitled ladies' room mural by *Yasuo Kuniyoshi*



In the third floor Ladies' Powder Room, *Henry Billings* executed an oil-on-canvas mural measuring 10-feet wide by 5-feet high entitled: "Panther Mural" (1932). The work is more in the Surrealistic style than the more typical Art Deco style with its "unreality" qualities. The panther in the foreground ready to spring into action is a metaphor for power. The background is desolate, isolated and dreamlike. ³⁷¹



Grand Lounge

The Great Stage

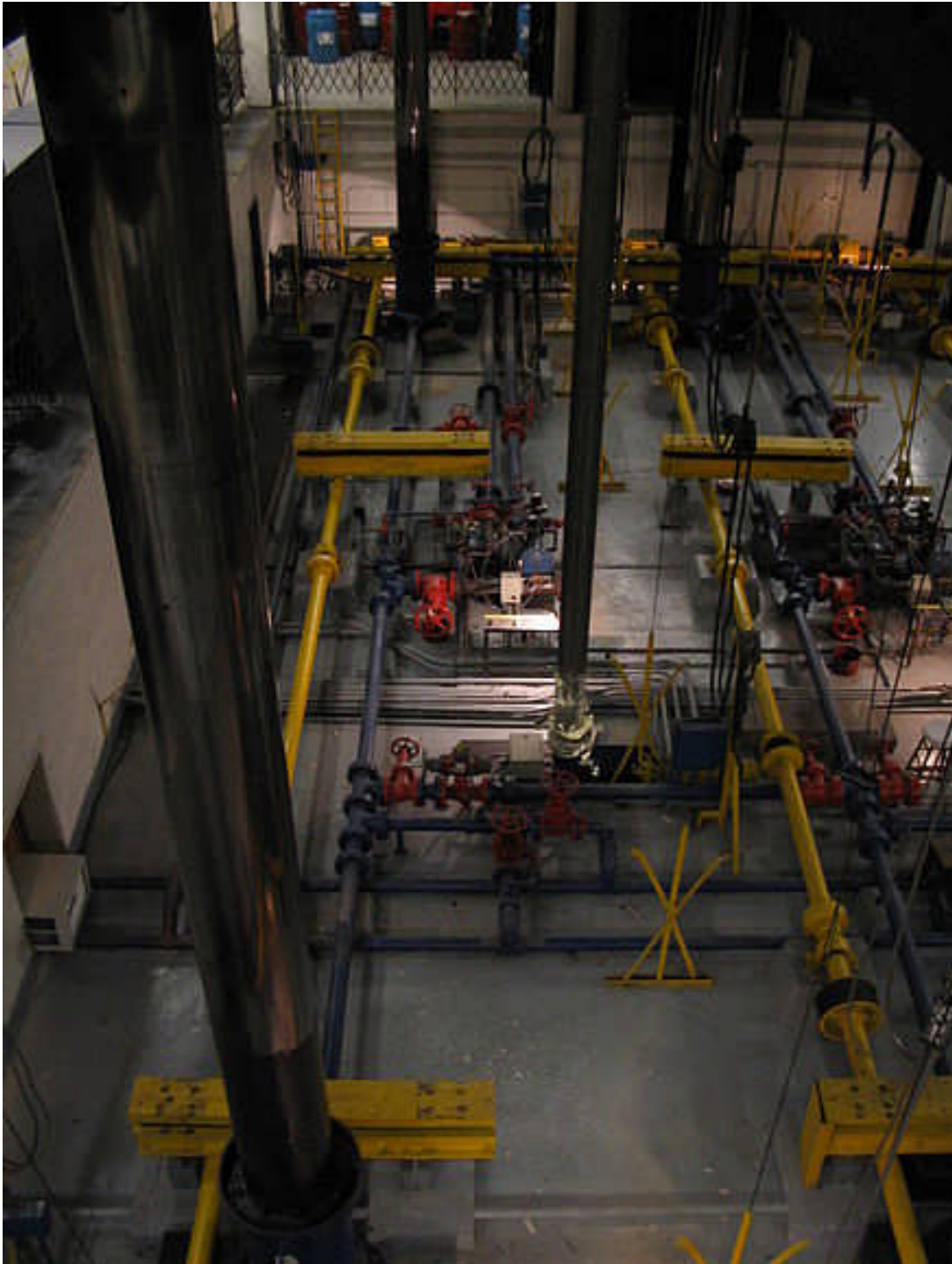
“...the world’s largest indoor stage, a wonderland of ingenious mechanisms at the Radio City Music Hall, Rockefeller Center, New York City, is ready for its first performance. Elaborate mechanical features will make possible the presentation of super-spectacles, ballets, band concerts, choruses, variety acts, circus performances, minstrels, with scenic effects never before attained...”

Popular Science, February 1933

RE: the “Great Stage,” designed by *Peter Clark*, measures 66.5-feet by 144-feet and resembles a setting sun. Its system of elevators was so advanced that the *U.S. Navy* incorporated identical hydraulics in constructing WWII aircraft carriers. Supposedly, during the war the basement was guarded to safeguard the Navy’s technological advantage. Clark designed the elevators which were built by the *Otis Elevator Company*.

“...With three or four hundred performers taking part in a single spectacle, with thousands of stage, light and sound tricks available, planning a performance is not a matter of mere conferences. The proposed show is actually registered on blueprints and sketches which, when approved, go to the great carpentry, ‘prop’ and costume shops, far below the stage, for the production of material objects. Scripts must be prepared for sound and lights as well as for players. To synchronize the proposed performance, tiny models of the stage settings and the players are first tried out on miniature stages...”

Popular Mechanics, January 1941



“...The stage, 144-feet wide and 80-feet deep, can be raised or lowered hydraulically in three sections, presenting different levels. In addition, a circular center section, fifty-five feet in diameter, can be revolved in either direction. When each position of the stage is assumed, the sections automatically lock in place. This is said to be the first time a revolving stage and a stage that can be raised and lowered have been combined. The design was worked out by the New York firm of theatrical architects, Peter Clark, Inc...Another feature is a motorized orchestra pit, seventy-five feet long and holding more than a hundred players, which rises into view at any one of three positions on stage”

Left: hydraulics pit beneath the Great Stage

“...The secret of the trick stage lies in the fact that it is not a stage at all in the ordinary sense, but instead consists of three fifty-ton hydraulic plunger elevators, seventy-five feet wide and fifteen feet deep. These elevators may be lifted thirteen feet above “stage level” or dropped twenty-seven feet below, singly or together. Thus, for example, while two rows of dancing girls might be performing on two of the elevators, the third might be loading up with a third group down below. A quick and complete blackout for a very short time would permit the stage director to drop two elevators and raise the third so that when the lights came on, an entirely different group of girls in different costumes and in a different setting might be doing a different routine...”

Popular Mechanics, January 1941



“...To the three stage elevators, add one more: the elevator in front of the stage which supports the orchestra “bandwagon.” This lift may be brought to stage level, or above. Again, it may be dropped twenty-seven feet under the audience. The huge bandwagon, in turn, is self-propelled by electric motors and batteries so that, lifted to stage level, it can move back onto one of the stage elevators and then continue its journey upward. Or, it can be dropped below, into the pit, shunted to the rear and placed on a lowered stage elevator, then lifted high above the stage. Accomplished in the dark, it is a very effective stunt...”

Popular Mechanics, January 1941



“...Twin pipe-organ consoles mounted on wheels roll into view, one on either side of the stage, when in use, and slip back into special alcoves when the organs are silent...”

Popular Science, February 1933

RE: RCMH’s “Mighty Wurlitzer” pipe organ. It was the largest theater pipe organ built for a movie theater at the time it was installed in 1932. Identical consoles with four keyboards were installed on both sides of the *Great Stage*. Each console operates independently, with the one on the audience’s left being the primary. The organ’s 4,410 pipes were installed in chambers on either side of the proscenium arch. It was the largest pipe-organ produced by the *Rudolph Wurlitzer Manufacturing Company of North Tonawanda, New York* and was built as a serious concert instrument rather than for accompanying silent movies. Capable of playing many styles of music, the historic organ/s were rebuilt in time for the theater’s restoration in 1999.

Above: caption: “left to right: left console in stored position / left console in playing position / left console with Howard Seat”



Left: RCMH pioneer organists *Dick Liebert* and *Raymond Bohr*

“...Experts, standing before long rows of electric buttons in a small pit in front of the stage, control the movements of the various sections, the appearance and disappearance of the organ consoles and the rise and descent of the orchestra pit. In addition, they adjust the position of the mammoth contour curtain at the front of the stage. Thirteen lift cables, each with a separate electric motor, permit it to be draped into any one of a score of different positions to attain unusual scenic effects. The unique armor-plate construction of the ceiling hall permits special spotlights to be played upon the stage from openings between the various overlapping sections. Runways and compartments for the operators of these lights have been incorporated in the design of the roof of the building. On either side of the stage, steel light towers, thirty-feet high, hold from seven to twenty-five spot and floodlights, fed by electric cables dropping from the ceiling. These towers are mounted on wheels so they can be moved about to provide spectacular lighting displays. Behind the stage a special room broadcasts sound effects while a projection booth adds to the realism of performances by scenic effects flashed upon a screen.”

Popular Science, February 1933

Blackout



“...Since practically all stage and scene legerdemain depends upon the slowness with which the eye accustoms itself to darkness following brilliant light, a complete blackout is necessary for the trick effects. This again is accomplished by clever mechanics. In addition to 25,000 light bulbs, any number of which may be lighted at one time, 206 spotlights are used. Thirty-six of these spotlights are of the huge arc type capable of throwing a ‘spot’ 190 feet and require about thirty seconds for the carbons to cool. Obviously unless all these lights were extinguished instantaneously and the glow from the huge carbons was halted, there could be no blackout...”

Popular Mechanics, January 1941

Miracles of Illumination

“...To douse thousands of light bulbs and 206 spotlights in an instant, the theater uses a remarkable piece of equipment called a light-control console which looks like an oversize telephone switchboard. By pre-setting the 4,305 vari-colored handles on this board, the throwing of a single switch performs what seems to be miracles of illumination. If a blackout is needed, a switch not only turns off the light bulbs in unison, but also causes thirty-six little motors to drop thirty-six shutters over the arc spotlight lenses. The same board regulates changes of light colors throughout the whole auditorium, whether it is to shift one spotlight from blue to purple or to produce fifty combinations...”

Popular Mechanics, January 1941



“...Each of the 25,000 light bulbs, which range from two to 5,000 watts and total 3,500,000 watts, has a tiny track running in front of it. Hundreds of little motors cause thousands of gelatin color frames to travel in these tracks. By setting a group of handles on the control machine and throwing a switch, the electrician at the light-control console can move color frames in front of thousands of bulbs and the whole light scheme can be changed. The machine, through thermionic control, which works on a principle similar to that of radio tubes, will also regulate the dimming or brightening of the lights at will...”

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Popular Mechanics, January 1941



“...To the trick stage and trick lighting systems, add such novel mechanical equipment as vanishing footlights which become a part of the stage floor, permanent fixtures which produce torrential rainstorms, fireproof snowstorms, a hurricane effect by the use of airplane propellers and clouds from an imported cloud machine. The combination of magical effects become numberless. Even the curtain, the largest in the world, weighing three tons, is a puzzler. Normally, it closes the proscenium, a gap sixty feet high by 100 feet wide. Yet, without the curtain being lowered, sections can be dropped independently to frame a single performer, or two groups. To permit this, thirteen cables were sewn into the gold fabric and thirteen motors, operating independently or together, are controlled by the stage director. To drop two sections, he need only push down two buttons on the control board backstage...”

Popular Mechanics, January 1941

Hearing is Believing

“...Sound was a prime problem, for patrons in the front row are 160 feet closer to the performance than those in the rear and each of the 6,200 persons in a full house is a different distance from the stage. Thus, sounds must be uniform throughout the 1,800,800 cubic feet of space. Scientific application of sound mechanics plus planning along geometric lines has resulted in acoustics so perfect that the back row patrons hear the same tones with the same modulation as those up against the orchestra. Key to the system is the sound mixer who, listening to the various sounds carried into his room from all parts of the theater, tunes each up or down as necessary to produce a harmonious effect evenly distributed throughout the auditorium. The sound mixer controls sixty microphones, sixty amplifiers and twenty-three loud speakers. The frequency range of the system is from thirty to 13,000 cycles. Microphones, of the velocity ribbon type, are located in the orchestra pit, the footlights, the organ chambers, light bridges. Fifty special sound effects, such as a train or thunder, are also controlled in the room...”

Popular Mechanics, January 1941



The Center Theatre



Located at 1236 Avenue of the Americas (SE corner at 49th Street, left) and known for most of its existence as the “Center Theatre,” this Art Deco-style movie palace opened as the *New RKO Roxy Theatre* on December 29th 1932. The lobby (above) had three ticket offices and the *Grand Foyer* was illuminated by day through five large exterior windows of opaque glass etched in relief. During darkness, the lighting was via three glass globes at ceiling height and two lower hanging glass globes. It was decorated in red and gold fabric with “Bubinga” mahogany walls and vermilion doors leading to the auditorium.



The auditorium (above) had 75-foot high walls that were paneled with African mahogany and a ceiling decorated with figures from Greek mythology. Centered over the orchestra section was a 400-bulb, 104K-watt chandelier; 25-feet in diameter weighing six-tons. Claimed as the largest of its kind, the fixture required its own cooling system. The proscenium opening was 60-feet wide and extended in height from stage floor to the ceiling. Just as in RCMH, the *New RKO Roxy Theatre* had three shallow mezzanines, with respective seating capacities of 406, 655 and 559. The orchestra section accommodated 1,890 giving the theater a total capacity of 3,510. The *Grand Foyer* was also similar to that at RCMH in that it had a wide staircase and elevators to the top mezzanine and a *Grand Lounge* in the basement. After successful litigation by the owners of the original *Roxy Theatre* on 7th Avenue and 50th Street, the New RKO Roxy Theatre was renamed the *RKO Center Theatre* in 1933 and it began to feature second-run double bill films. In 1934, “RKO” was dropped from the Center’s name. As a movie house, the theater was unsuccessful thus it returned to presenting live shows including some “Ice Spectaculars” until it closed and became an NBC studio in 1950. When NBC’s lease expired in May 1954, a decision was made to demolish the theater. In its place was built a high-rise commercial office building, in harmony with the architecture of *Rockefeller Center*.

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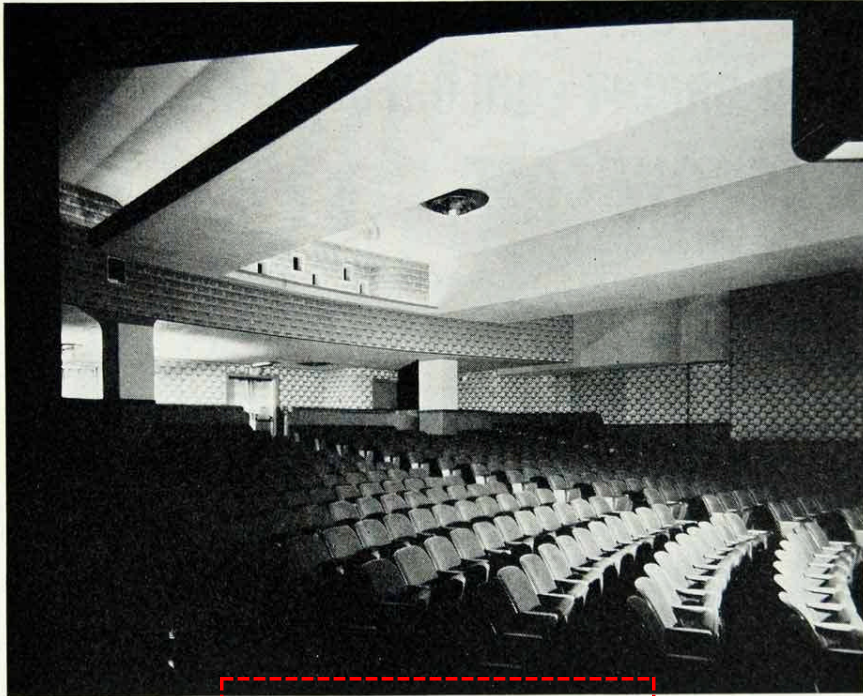
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40th STREET AND SIXTH AVENUE

**RADIO CITY
NEW ROXY**
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"Next door to the Music Hall on 50th Street is the Guild, which opened in 1938 as an Embassy Newsreel house, one of a chain of five in Manhattan and Newark. ('World Around in Sight and Sound' was their motto.)...The lease with Rockefeller Center stipulated that the theater never charge less than 25 cents a ticket, to keep things high-toned. In 1949, Norman Elson, who was then the president of the competing Trans-Lux chain, took over the Newsreel theaters. 'That was just the beginning of TV,' Peter Elson recalled, 'and he saw that newsreels were not much longer for the world.' Norman Elson remodeled the theater and reopened it as the Guild...The Guild's 450-seat auditorium is to be demolished. Its shell will be combined with an adjacent former bank branch at 40 Rockefeller Plaza to create an enormous new retail space...Jerry I. Speyer, the president and chief executive of Tishman Speyer, said it was simply a case of a tenant 'whose time had long passed, because of the size and scale of the theater. The place was empty most of the time,' Mr. Speyer said. 'It just had gotten tired.' The theater and bank space, on street and concourse level, will yield a store of 20,000 square feet...The Guild was a vestige of the newsreel houses that fed America's appetite for moving images of world events in the decades before television. It was a remnant of the small, family-owned theaters that dared take a chance on 'art' films. And it was a reminder that Rockefeller Center once had room for modestly scaled businesses..."

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The New York Times, October 19th 1999

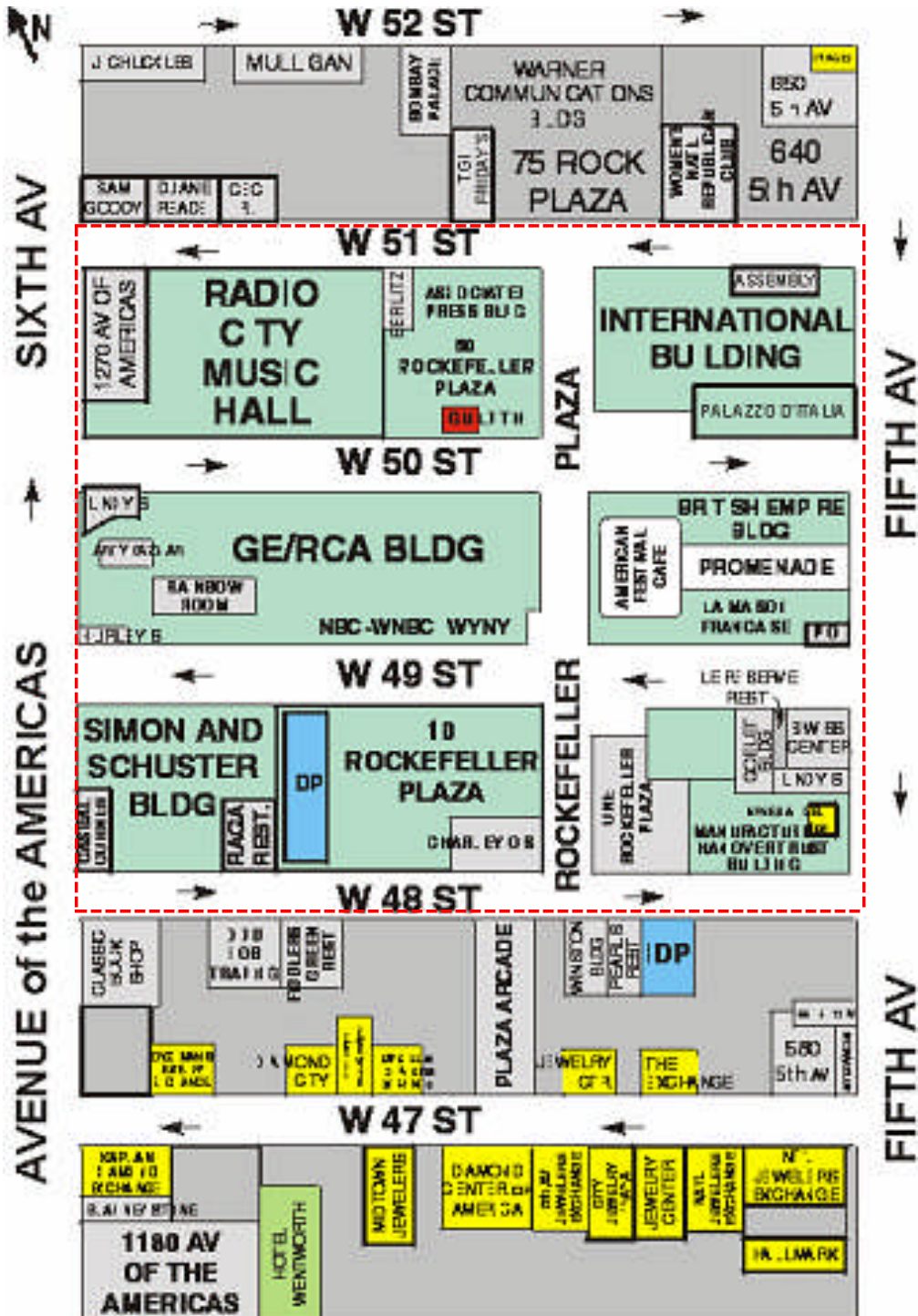
Part 6

Fighting to Get In

“...They all laughed at Rockefeller Center now they’re fighting to get in...”

RE: lyrics from a *George and Ira Gershwin* song entitled: “They All Laughed” (from the 1937 film *Shall We Dance* starring *Fred Astaire* and *Ginger Rogers*)

Hub of Vast Enterprises

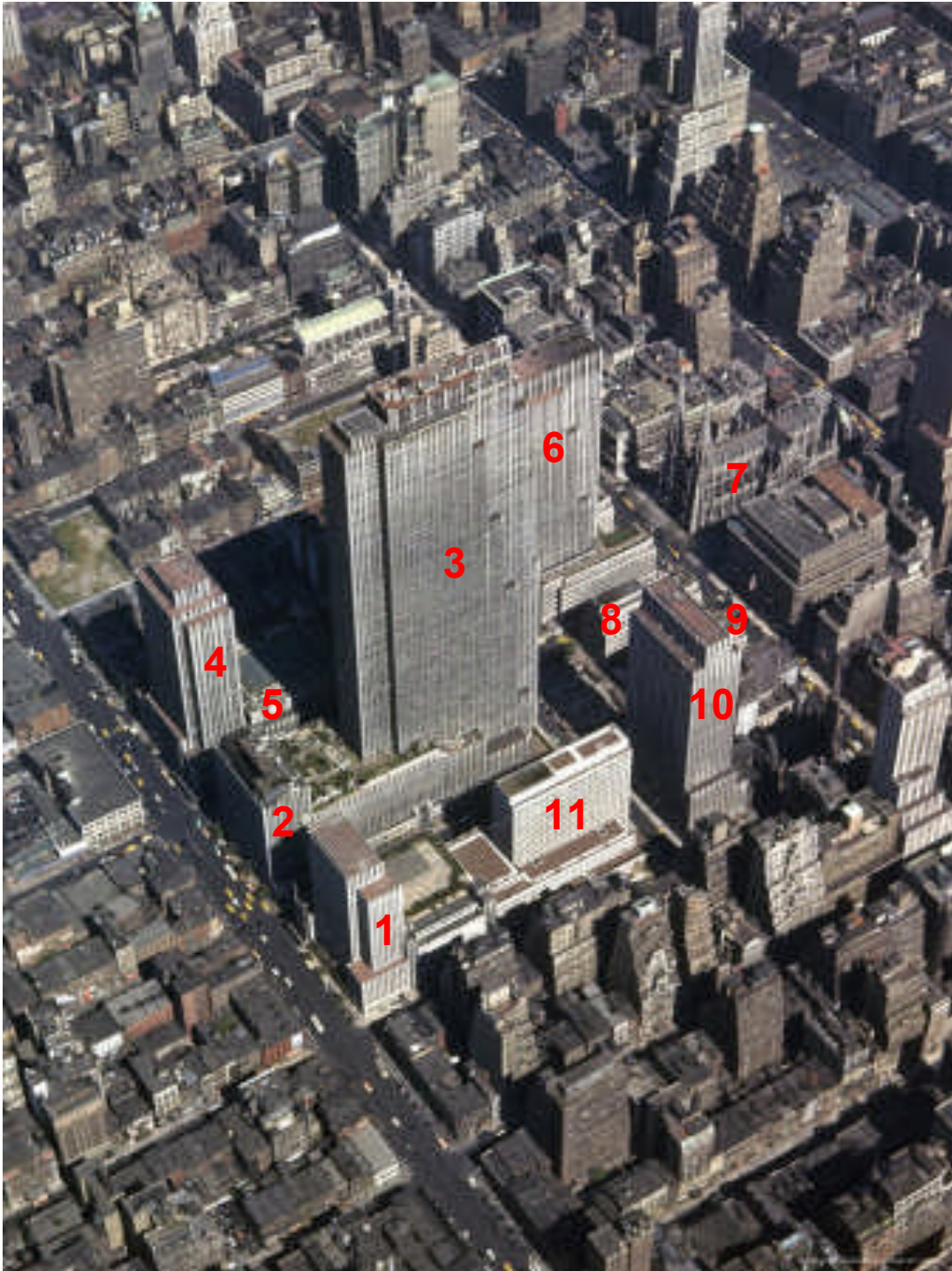


"...If enemy bombs should burst among New York buildings above and disable Rockefeller Center, the shock would set the activities of a multitude of men trembling like the needle of a seismograph. In distant jungles the geologists of great oil companies would pause in their prospecting. In hospitals, colleges and laboratories the beneficiaries of the world's greatest philanthropist would wonder. The workers in great rubber, chemical and glass plants would be cut off from their executive brains. The flow of news from the world's biggest news distributor would be interrupted. Millions of radio 'soap opera' listeners would be stranded in suspense. The foreign offices of eighteen countries would be deprived of their most important U.S. consulates. And the issue of the world's biggest newspaper might come out, very apologetically, a day or two late..."
Life magazine, January 12th 1942



“...The result is a dozen limestone office buildings and two big theaters which have become the country’s greatest showplace, tourist attraction, broadcasting source and business center...”

Life magazine, January 12th 1942



“...To locate the Center’s units, start at bottom middle of picture at left. This is Sixth Avenue & 48th Street and the structure is the U.S. Rubber Co. Building (1) which is built over the Center Theatre. Move clockwise up Sixth Avenue to the left. The next building is the low RCA Building West extension (2) of the 70-story RCA Building (3) which dominates the Center. Next along Sixth Avenue is the RKO Building (4) which also houses the enormous Radio City Music Hall (5). Hidden behind the RCA Building is the Associated Press Building. Peeping out at right of the RCA Building is a corner of the 41-story International Building (6), across Fifth Avenue from the spires of St. Patrick’s Cathedral (7). Turn right down Fifth Avenue to the low British Empire Building (8) and its twin, the Maison Francaise (9). Next comes the 36-story Time-Life Building (10). Look left now at the thin building rising out of a low roof. This is the Eastern Airlines Building (11) and roof terrace around it runs towards Sixth Avenue and the U.S. Rubber Building...”

Life magazine, January 12th 1942

The Important Business of the Center



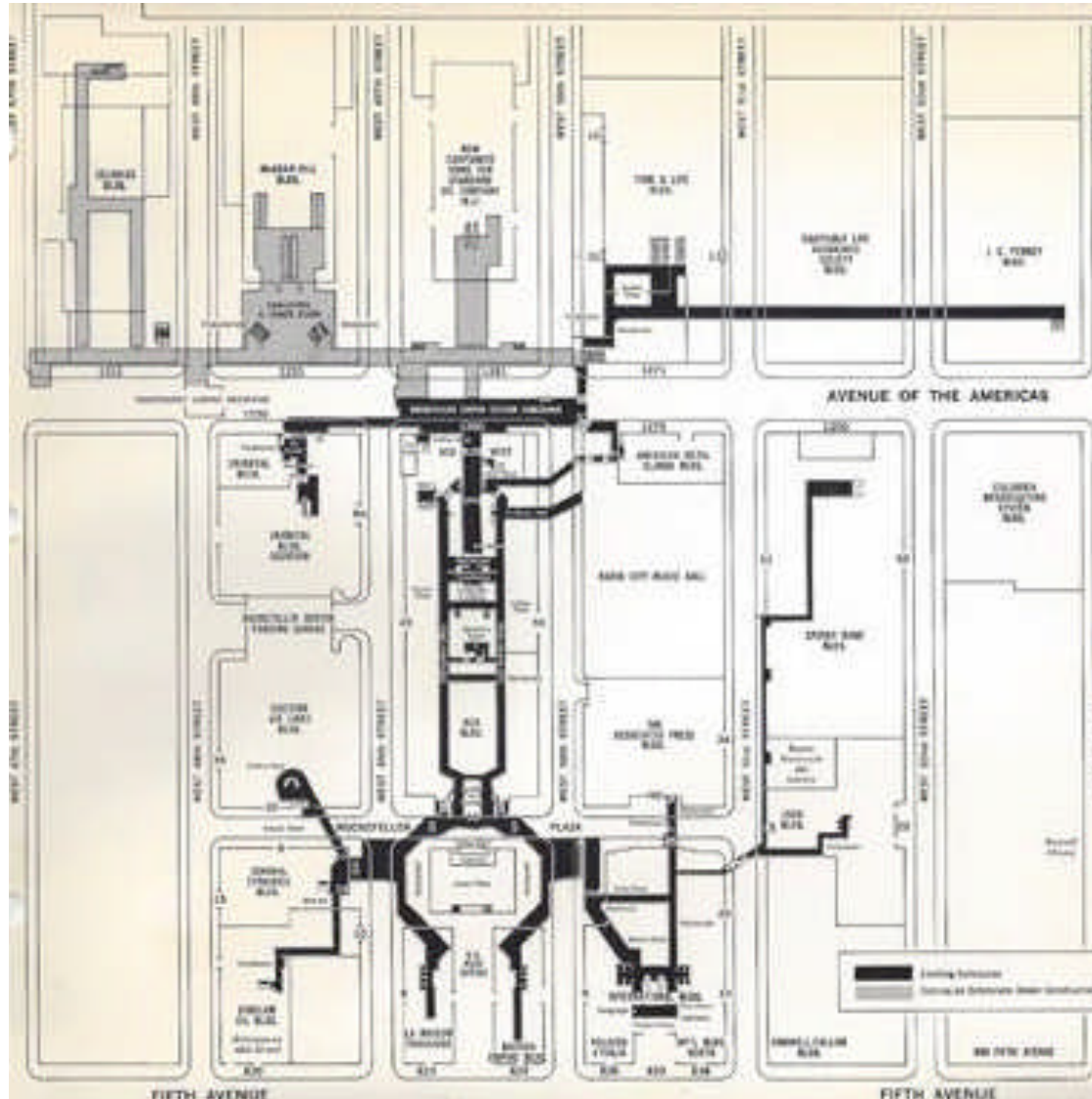
“...The people touring through Rockefeller Center get so much of gardens and glamour, murals and marbled halls, sculpture and statistics that they usually overlook the main purpose of the Center which is to provide space where people can work. The handsome buildings are simply limestone shells put up to support layers of floors which can be cut up by office walls. In the plain cubicles of clerks and the carpeted sanctums of the Bosses, the important business of the center goes on...”

Life magazine, January 12th 1942

The Great and the Goofy

“...Some the Center’s tenants are great and some seem goofy. The great ones include RCA, U.S. Rubber, RKO, American Cyanamid, Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Standard Oil of New Jersey, Consolidated Oil, Curtis Wright, Eastern Airlines, Associated Press, Shell Oil and on and on. The RKO Building is full of theatrical agents. A whole floor of the International Building is given over to dentists. The Center’s basements are lined with shops that sell rugs, nuts, crockery, canaries, books, jelly, Girl Scout uniforms. A man could get almost everything he needs for comfortable living in the Center although he cannot buy a night’s lodging there or get liquor in bottles...”

Life magazine, January 12th 1942



Above: caption: “Underground Connecting Concourse – Rockefeller Center Area.” In 1940, after four years of construction, a new Subway line arrived directly under the RC shopping concourse. Presently, seven Subway lines connect to RC.

A Profitless Pit (?)

“...When the Center was first put up, it was greeted with general disbelief and derision. Mr. Rockefeller was advised by the press and public that he was pouring money into a profitless pit. Today the Center is about 97% rented and is beginning to make money. Tenants pay an average of about \$3 a square foot for space. They get heat and water free but have to pay for light and cleaning. Generally they are very happy in the Center...”

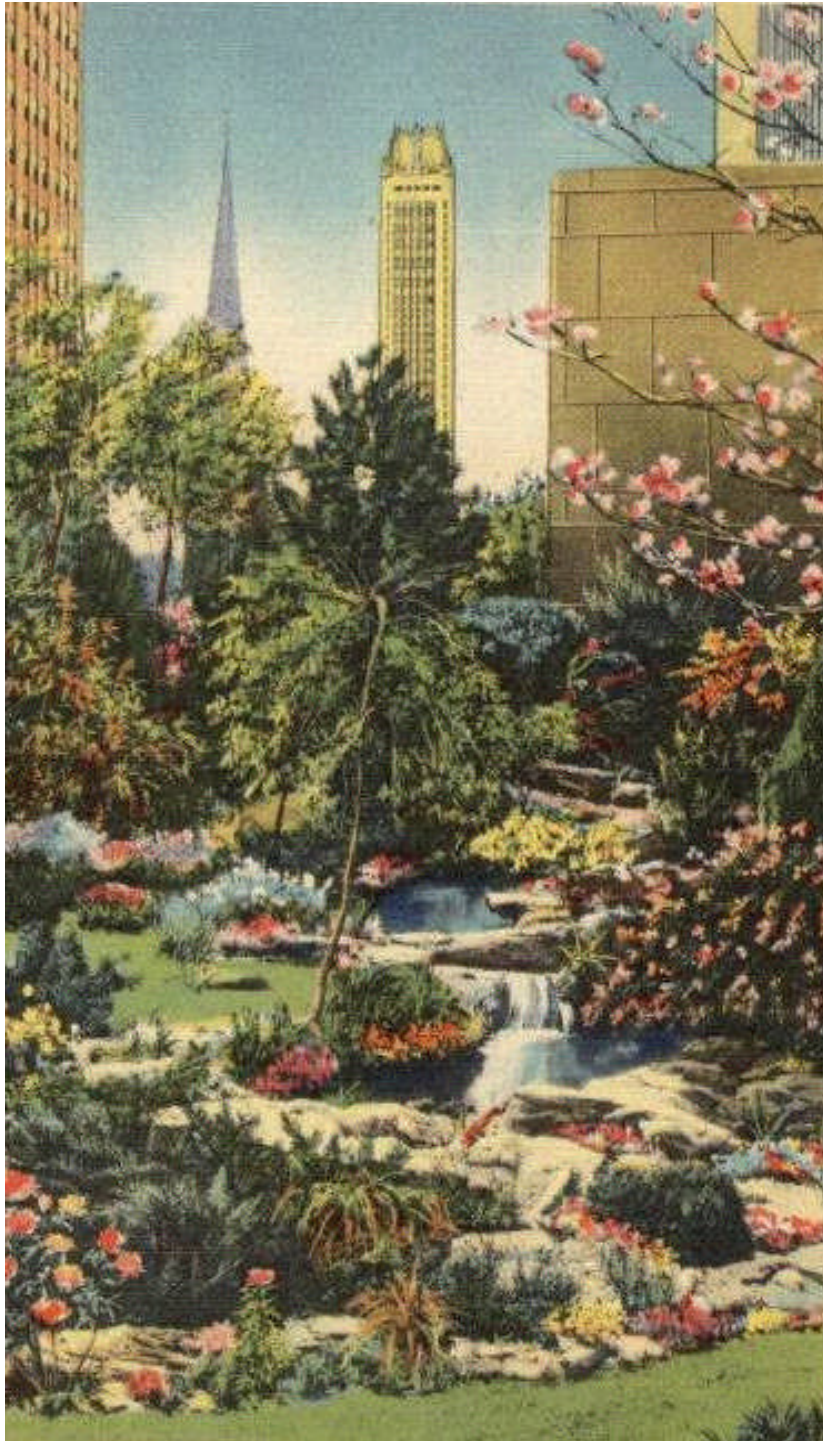
Life magazine, January 12th 1942

“...The best-known tenant in the Center is also its owner, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who occupies a whole floor in the RCA Building. His second son, Nelson, is president of the Center but he is now in Washington on leave of absence to promote Pan American goodwill. Two other Rockefeller sons are on the board of directors. Mr. John Jr. is a director but he is very much the Center’s boss. He makes personal tours around the buildings to look at construction progress or to see how the chrysanthemums or the cacti or the ice rink in the Plaza are doing. Any fairly large Center question is usually presented to him for consideration. When his associates wanted to name the 65th-floor restaurant the ‘Stratosphere Room,’ Mr. John objected. ‘It would give people a wrong idea of how high up it is,’ he said firmly and his associates finally settled for the name ‘Rainbow Room’...”

Life magazine, January 12th 1942



RC celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1982 with an edible version of 30 Rock in the lower plaza. From left to right: *Richard A. Voell*, *David Rockefeller* and NYC mayor *Ed Koch* were given the honor of cutting the first slice.



“...Because he owns the Center, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. has become an important restaurant operator (Rainbow Room), owner of the world’s largest theater (Music Hall) and operator of the country’s biggest tourist business. Rockefeller Center lures more tourists than any other place in America, even including Niagara Falls and Mount Vernon. Sightseers wander over roof gardens where roses grow, birds nest and bees make honey. They peer out at the city’s environs from the 70th-Floor roof. They admire the art in the lobby, play with the gadgets in the science museum, gape at the stars in the broadcasting studios, gasp at the size of the Music Hall whose lobby is magnificent and whose powder rooms are positively palatial...”

Life magazine, January 12th 1942

Left: caption (postcard): “International Rock Garden, Gardens of the Nations. Rockefeller Center, New York City”











Armies of the Night



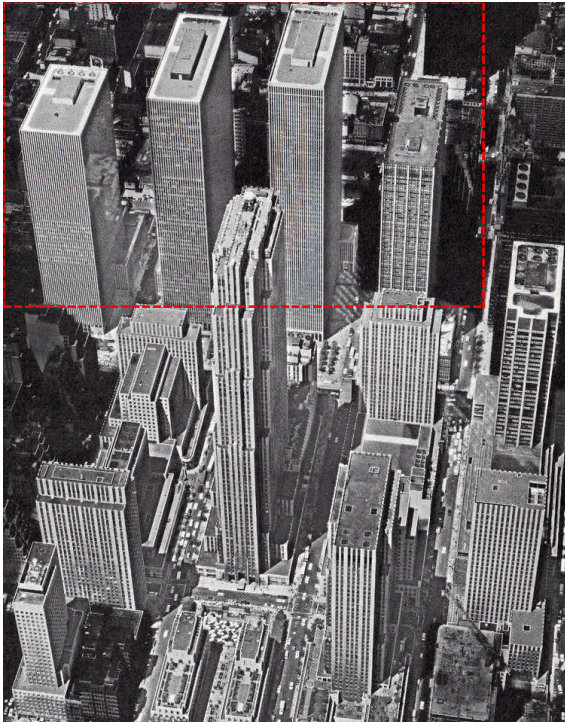
“...When day is done and the workers leave their limestone hives, an unobtrusive army moves in on the Center to mop and polish and remove the traces of the daily struggles. Proceeding in orderly fashion, cleaning women move in at 7 p.m. and are out by 1:15 a.m. They sweep, dust desks, generally pick up things. Night porters, who do heavier work, come in at 11 p.m. and go out by 7:30 a.m. as do specialists like furniture retouchers and spot removers. ‘High dusters,’ who dust tops of high cabinets, high moldings, etc., work on an earlier shift – from 6:30 p.m. to 3 a.m....”

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Life magazine, January 12th 1942

Almost Always Right

“...Nobody realizes how much trouble the center sees – basins that get clogged, windows that stick, pipes that leak, radiators that grow cold and ice water that turns warm. The Center’s motto is that the tenant is always – or almost always – right. Though it seldom scolds tenants, the Center has found it necessary to chide tobacco-chewing executives and warn them that their bad aim is ruining their expensive rugs.”
Life magazine, January 12th 1942



The *Exxon Building* (1251 Sixth Avenue) by *Harrison, Abramovitz & Harris* was built from 1967 to 1971 as the second building in the post-WWII *Rockefeller Center Extension* across *Sixth Avenue*. The first plans for three new office towers; *Exxon*, *McGraw-Hill* and *Celanese Building/s*, were made in 1963 by *Harrison and Abramovitz*. Known as the “XYZ” plan, it arranged the buildings around a large sunken central plaza (with entrances to the new buildings and the RC concourse) with the centermost one placed north-south, at right angles with the established Manhattan gridline. However, in the realized plan all the buildings were placed east-west on adjacent blocks. Due to the buildings’ excess bulk, NYC zoning laws required the western ends of the plots to be used as north-south public promenades running through each block. The 54-story Exxon Building occupies the plot opposite the *GE Building* (30 Rock) and is the second-tallest building in the whole of RC. Facing Sixth Avenue, there is a sunken plaza with a large pool and fountains as well as trees. Unfortunately, none of these newer skyscrapers have the architectural quality of RC’s original structures. Compared with the limestone facade and ornate decoration of the *RCA* or *International Building*, the Center’s postwar structures are run-of-the mill NYC International-style flat-top skyscrapers.



Top: aerial view (RC Extension highlighted)
Bottom: plot map showing the location (highlighted) of the RC Extension on the western-side of Sixth Avenue



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