

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic Plaza Hotel

and/or common

## 2. Location

street & number Fifth Avenue at 59th Street not for publication

city, town New York vicinity of

state New York code county New York code

## 3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Westin Hotels

street & number

city, town Seattle vicinity of state Washington

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New York County of Hall of Records

street & number 31 Chambers Street

city, town New York state New York

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title National Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Washington DC

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>1907-1913</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The following description of the Plaza is from the New York Landmark Commission's report written by Joan Olshansky:

Located on 5th Avenue at Central Park South (59th St.), the Plaza Hotel occupies one of the finest sites in the city and is the most elegant of the great New York hotels. Designed in the French Renaissance style, the massive, eighteen-story, white brick and marble structure is an outstanding example of American hotel architecture.

The Hotel, the second of this name at this location, was constructed between the years 1905-1907 from the plans of Henry J. Hardenbergh. The building is 275 feet long on the north side, 200 feet long on the east, 285 feet long on the south, and approximately 200 feet on the west.

The imposing dignity of the two principal faces of the hotel is due to the carefully worked out unity and symmetry of the basic design. Since the north and east elevations are often viewed together, the corner tower provides a strong, coherent transition from one to the other. Repetition of architectural motifs such as balconies, balustrades, arches, loggias, pilasters, and columns gives unity to the overall design. The picturesque gables of the Fifth Avenue front successfully counterbalance the ornate dormers facing Central Park. The relation of the upper loggias to the breaks in the front wall has been skillfully worked out. It is these subtleties of design, as well as many attractive details, which make the hotel so satisfying architecturally.

Both of the main facades are tripartite in composition, being composed of a recessed central portion with projected terminal sections at each corner. Vertically, they consist of a base, a shaft and a crown, each clearly marked off by horizontal string courses or balconies for emphasis. The base consists of three stories of marble, two of which are rusticated. The shaft is formed by ten floors of white brick topped by a marble balcony which casts a band of deep shadow. The crown consists of the top five floors including the gables on the Avenue side and steep slate roofs with their dormers facing the park. The two corners of the rusticated base on the east side are rounded, and flow logically upward into turrets which rise uninterruptedly for fourteen floors, through shaft and roof crown, and are terminated by small domed roofs.

On the Fifth Avenue facade a low, broad terrace, called the Champagne Porch, once looked out over the square and opened from a restaurant, now the Fifth Avenue lobby. Doorways on either side of the open terrace gave access to the restaurant and were not removed when, in 1921, the terrace was eliminated to make way for the present Fifth Avenue entrance. This entrance extends the width of the center portion and is composed of six columns in a modified version of the Tuscan order, topped by a balustraded balcony. Above this, paired pilasters of the Corinthian order rise through the second and third floors, supporting the continuous entablature and dividing the wall into five bays of windows. Tiers of windows arranged symmetrically rise one above the other, to form the simple brick shaft of the building but, toward the top, decorative string courses and the balcony are introduced, making the transition to the ornate roofs above. The gray-green mansard roof rises steeply and displays three tiers of picturesque dormer windows, varying in size and design, and creating a sparkle of light and shadow against the expanse of roof, which is topped by an elaborately patterned cresting of green copper.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of <sup>National</sup> Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1905-1907      **Builder/Architect** Henry Janeway Hardenbergh

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

One of America's most celebrated hotels, the Plaza opened on October 1, 1907. Its luxury, unmatched in the nation at a cost of \$12,000,000, an unheard of sum of money for a residential hotel at that time. When it opened, ninety percent of the guests were permanent residents, the first names on the register being Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt. Recently restored and refurbished, it is still a symbol of elegance at the northern end of one of the nation's finest shopping streets--Fifth Avenue.

The opulence of Henry Hardenbergh's design is a rarity in New York City--the building is set back from an open plaza on Fifth Avenue with the Pulitzer Fountain in front and also facing Central Park where it can clearly be seen as a unit.

The architectural detail is very imaginative and in the French Renaissance style with balconies, dormers, chimneys and loggias. The exterior "skin" is lavish but always controlled complimenting the over-all composition. The Plaza is an outstanding example of the eclectic architecture favored in America at the end of the 19th century.

Today's Plaza is the second hotel of the same name on the same site. The original Plaza was begun on the southeast corner of New York's Central Park in 1881. The location had been the site of an ice-skating rink that was a favorite spot for Mrs. Astor's "Four Hundred" close to Central Park but not really a part of it. The hotel was delayed for eight years until an insurance company foreclosed on one of its mortgages. It finally opened in 1890 and at a cost of \$3,000,000. It lasted a short fifteen years before the George A. Fuller Company bought it for three million dollars, the biggest cash real estate transaction in the previous history of New York. The new Plaza was to be bigger, grander, and much more expensive (they hoped to charge as much as \$2.50 a night for transient guests).

The dream of "the most luxurious hotel in the world" was realized by a small group of men who were all self-made millionaires. Ben Beinecke, a financier and wholesale meat dealer, Harry Black of the Fuller Construction Company, and John W. Gates who had made an enormous fortune selling barbed wire fencing. Gates was one of the richest men in America and a superb businessman but he was questionable socially because he gambled - he was known as "Betcha a Million Gates." The first manager of the new Plaza was the famous Fred Sterry who would give the hotel its reputation for grace, beauty, and above all, excellent service. The hotel was the immediate favorite of the Fifth Avenue dandies who were known as "Avenoodles," and has remained fashionable to this day.

The architect responsible for the Plaza was Henry Janeway Hardenbergh who had most recently designed the Willard Hotel in Washington and the Copley Plaza in Boston:

The architect had made a name for himself in New York with his Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on the present site of the Empire State Building and with an apartment building he had designed for Edward Clark of the Singer Sewing Machine Company, the Dakota on the west side of Central Park. A newer building on Manhattan's West Side, the Art Students League on West 57th Street, contained more clues than any of the others about what Hardenbergh would do with the Plaza commission. He would build it in the style of the French Renaissance.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 4.75

Quadrangle name Central Park

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	5	8	6	5	4	0	4	5	1	2	9	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Plaza Hotel, Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1274, Lot25. Bounded on the north by Central Park South, on the east by an unnamend street, on the south by West 58th Street on the west by the property lines of 21 West 58th Street and 24 Central Park South.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Pitts, Historian

organization History Division/National Park Service date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 1100 "L" Street NW telephone (202)343-8172

city or town Washington state DC

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date \_\_\_\_\_

Keeper of the National Register

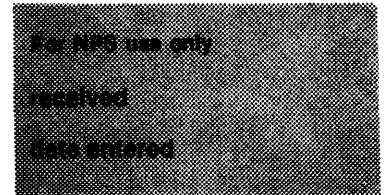
Attest:

date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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The Fifty-Ninth Street front, facing Central Park, has a symmetrical arrangement of elements. The main entrance is through an entrance porch in the recessed center portion. This same architectural motif is repeated at the top two floors, just below the roof, where five arched openings are separated by paired pilasters, reminiscent of the design used at the center of the Fifth Avenue front above the porch. A balcony with scrollwork extends the full width of the building on this side, and defines the five-story crown of the roof. In the central section of this roof, four tiers of dormers are set in a steep mansard roof. The corner sections are surmounted by high pyramidal roofs with large dormers which are flanked by smaller ones on each side.

Originally, there were only two entrances to the hotel, the main one on Fifty-Ninth Street and a more exclusive one on Fifty-Eighth Street, used for the most part by the permanent guests. The Fifty-Eighth Street facade, although in character with the two principal ones, is treated more simply. In 1921, three hundred more rooms were added to the hotel on this side.

The interior of the hotel retains many of its original features. The plan of the ground floor is essentially the same since the 1921 expansion. Wall materials, decorative elements and windows are original though refurbishing has taken place several times. The Fifth Avenue entrance and handsome lobby now lead to the world famous Palm Court, so named in the 1930s. In 1907 it was known as the Tea Room and was decorated with plate glass walls, columns of Caen stone and Breche violet marble brought by chartered ship from Italy, Chinese cachepots and mirror panels which all remain. It also had a Tiffany glass domed ceiling which was removed in the 1940's when the floor above was remodeled.

South of the Fifth Avenue lobby is the renowned Persian Room, decorated after the repeal of Prohibition by Joseph Urban and Lillian Palmedo. At the opening of the hotel this was the site of the Rose Room or Fifty-Eighth Street Restaurant.

The Fifty-Ninth Street entrance lobby contains the original marble walls and decorative elements. To the east is the Edwardian Room, named in 1955, but originally called the Fifth Avenue Cafe, and recently restored to its early appearance of dark wood paneling with red damask under a beamed ceiling and windows which overlook Central Park and Grand Army Plaza.

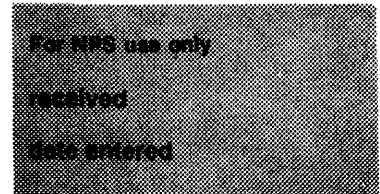
To the west of the Fifty-Ninth Street lobby is the Oak Bar, with its original paneled walls of British oak and three Everett Shinn murals, one over the bar, of the Pulitzer fountain, and two night scenes of Grand Army Plaza at the turn of the century. The Oak Room, next to the bar, is a restaurant with early, though not original, decoration. It was recently refurbished.

The staff dining room was located in the southwest corner of the building in the 1921 addition. The room was recently redecorated and is now the Oyster Bar restaurant.

The ballroom, one flight up on the Fifty-Eighth Street side of the building, replaced the original ballroom in 1921. It has recently been redecorated with gold leaf, new draperies, and new furniture. The original ballroom, at the northwest end of the building, was two stories high, and was remodeled into offices.

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The State Apartments, now private dining rooms and once part of Harry F. Guggenheim's apartment, is also on the first floor and faces Central Park. The suite retains its original decor, fireplaces, and light fixtures. In 1974 the apartment was restored to its original appearance.

The east facade of the Plaza Hotel faces toward the Grand Army Plaza, which extends from Fifty-Eighth Street to Sixtieth Street on the north and south, and Fifth Avenue on the east. The western boundary is the unnamed street in front of the Plaza Hotel. The design of this large area is like that of a European square and is one of the few squares of this quality existing in New York City. No other hotel in New York commands such an important and beautiful site.

Changes to the Plaza Hotel:

1921: New wing built on Fifty-Eighth Street

Fifth Avenue entrance constructed. Six tall bronze torcheres, each with five frosted ball globes encircling a clear lamp, which were on the first floor balcony overlooking Fifth Avenue, were removed and put in storage. In the 1940s two of these were put outside the Fifth Avenue entrance and the four remaining fixtures were placed at the Fifty-Ninth Street doors.

Plaza Restaurant became Fifth Avenue lobby

New Ballroom, in new wing, replaced the original ballroom which was remodeled into offices

1934: Persian Room opened at the location of the 58th Street Restaurant

1930s: Beginning of the breaking up of the large suites of permanent guests into rooms for transients

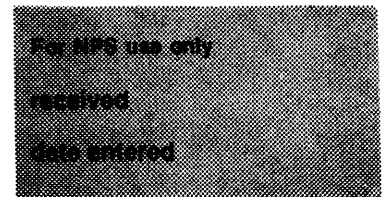
1940s: Removal of Tiffany ceiling in Palm Court to construct mezzanine

1969: Oyster Bar opened

1974 to present: Refurbishing of public rooms, restaurants, lobbies; replacement of elevators, rugs, draperies, etc.

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The design phase took place during the remaining term of the lease on the old building and the day it expired, in June, 1905, demolition began. The day after that, Fred Sterry went on the payroll and began ordering carpets, tapestries, china and silver. Two months later the old building was gone and New York's sidewalk superintendents started taking bets on how long it would take to build the new one. The contractors said it would be ready in 28 months. The sidewalk superintendents couldn't help grinning.

The Plaza was built, furnished and ready for guests 27 months later, in early fall, 1907. The New York Times couldn't believe it. "This is the speed record in the construction of hotels in this city", it said, "and it very likely follows as a corollary in the world."

All the furniture in the hotel had been made by the Pooley Company of Philadelphia whose owner, E. F. Pooley, had also served as a design consultant. What they weren't able to make, they went to Europe to find. They bought linen in Ireland, crystal in France, lace curtains in Switzerland. They bought so much, in fact, the only practical way to get it all to New York was to charter their own ships.

The emphasis was on making the new hotel elegant in the manner of the French chateaux and they surely succeeded. On the hotel's opening day, Pooley drew the prize for understatement when he said: "Mr. Sterry has given New York a typical French house. The Louis periods have been carefully studied and carried out. The whole aspect of the place is cheerful."

The \$12,500,000 price tag on The Plaza had come out to be about a million dollars over the original estimate. It has nothing at all to do with the handwoven Savonnerie rugs they had placed in the lobbies, nor the three hundred thousand dollars they had paid for silver flatware and candelabra. All that had been taken into account in the original cost estimate as had the 10 elevators, more than any hotel in the world had at the time, and the five marble staircases. The extra million, went to buy additional land along Fifty-Eighth and Fifty-Ninth Streets.

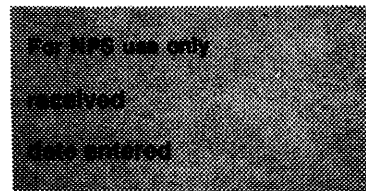
In spite of Fred Sterry's confidence that improvement would never be necessary, still more land was bought less than 15 years later to build a \$2,500,000 annex on the Fifty Eighth Street side."<sup>1</sup>

Westin Hotels purchased the hotel in January 1975, for \$25,000,000.

Not only was the Plaza fully booked on opening day, October 1, 1907, but a number of people came to see or be seen:

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Diamond Jim Brady was one, but the crowd was distracted from his face by the woman on his arm, no less a person than Lillian Russell. Other actresses came along to add even more glamour. Billie Burke, Maxine Elliott and Fritzi Scheff were among them. People like David Belasco and Oscar Hammerstein, who had helped make them famous, came too. And for the ladies across the street, John Drew put in an appearance. But probably the most interesting face any of them saw that day belonged to Mark Twain, very close to 72 years old by then. The people outside had something else to gape at. Some of the guests were leaving The Plaza in the new "auto-cabs" that had, not coincidentally, hit the streets for the first time that day. "Auto-buses" had replaced the Fifth Avenue stagecoaches early in the summer, and using automobiles for public transportation was a natural corollary. Credit for the idea goes to a New Yorker named Harry Allen, who also gets credit for originating the term "taxi," to draw attention to a device he had developed called a "taxi-meter," which let riders know exactly what they should pay for a ride."<sup>2</sup>

Changes to the hotel were made in time. The Champagne Porch, the terrace on the Fifth Avenue side was removed in 1921 to become the grand entrance on that elevation. Prohibition had dealt it a death blow. But the Tea Room with its Tiffany ceiling (now gone) is now known as the Palm Court and the most elegant of dining rooms the Edwardian Room, with oak wainscot and trussed ceiling, remains. The management made the mistake of changing it into "the Green Tulip" in 1971. Ada Louise Huxtable put an end to that folly in her New York Times column by calling it turgidly coy and a disaster area. The original room was Henry Hardenburgh's favorite - he designed it in what he called the German Renaissance style. The oak wainscotting and the pilasters came from England - a German room in a French chateaux with English wood. The adjacent bar still retains the 3 murals by the "Ashcan" painter, Everett Shinn.

The Plaza walls have echoed with the words of a great many famous people - the New York World called it the Home-for-the-Incurably Opulent. Ernest Hemingway suggested that his friend, F. Scott Fitzgerald, should "leave his liver to Princeton and his heart to the Plaza."

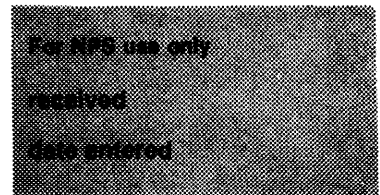
The Plaza's distinguished history was extolled by Enrico Caruso, Lord Duveen, S. R. Guggenheim, and others. Perhaps the most avid fan was Frank Lloyd Wright who stayed at the Plaza while working on the Guggenheim Museum. He advocated restoration but also told an interviewer:

"The Plaza was built by the Astors, Astorists, Astorites, Vanderbilts, Plasterbilts and Whoeverbilts who wanted a place to dress up and parade and see themselves in great mirrors. So they sent for the finest master of German Renaissance style -- Henry Hardenbergh, and he did this -- a skyscraper, but not the monstrous thing the skyscraper was to become later. He still managed to keep it with a human sense. There were Ravenna mosaics in the floor, but they covered them up with rugs. A lot of it has been spoiled by inferior desecrators - but The Plaza is my home."<sup>3</sup>



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Many also identify the Plaza as the hotel where Kay Thompson's "Eloise" lived or where the "Beatles" were mobbed. The hotel has also been used as background for many motion pictures as being one of the most familiar symbols of New York City.

Footnotes

1. Harris, William. The Plaza. Westin Hotels Color Library Books, 1982. Seventy-Fifth Anniversary New York, pp. 17-20.
2. Ibid., p. 29.
3. Ibid., p. 84.

10 Geographical Data:

Verbal Boundary

Plaza Hotel, Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1274, Lot 25. Bounded on the north by Central Park South, on the east by an unnamed street, on the south by West 58th Street and on the west by the property lines of 21 West 58th Steet and 24 Central Park South.

Newspaper Articles

East Side Herald, July 18, 1975.

Manhattan Gazette, December 1, 1973.

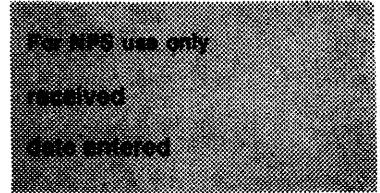
New York Times, November 24, 1888; October 5, 1890; October 1, 1907; December 25, 1966; February 12, 1974; May 18, 1976.

Sunday News, December 23, 1973.

Wall Street Journal, August 23, 1965.

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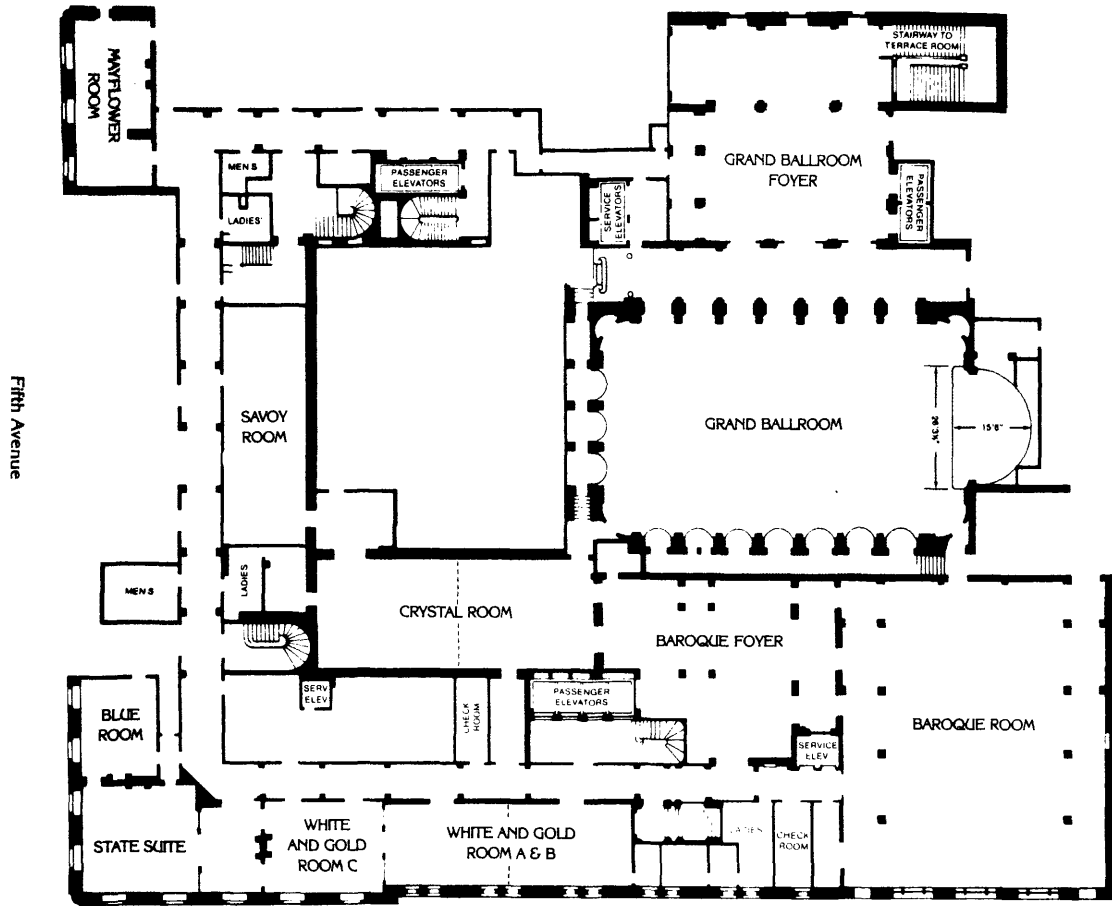
Olmsted, Frederick Law, Jr. and Kimball, Theodora (eds.). Forty Years of Landscape Architecture: Central Park. Cambridge: The M. I. T. Press, 1973.

Ordinances, Resolutions, Etc., Passed by the Board of Aldermen of The City of New York and Approved by The Mayor. XXVI. New York: Brown Printing and Binding Co. 1923.

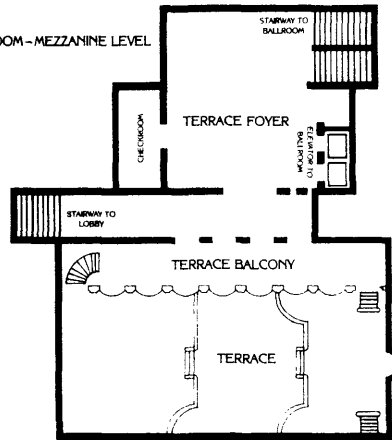
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FIRST FLOOR PRIVATE BANQUET ROOMS

Fifty-Eighth Street



TERRACE ROOM - MEZZANINE LEVEL



	Grand Ballroom	Ballroom Foyer	Baroque Room	Baroque Foyer	Terrace	Terrace Foyer	Crystal	Savoy	State	White & Gold	Mavflower	Blue
Banquets	750 (600 on flr)	200	450	120	300 Bal. - 100	170	170	120	70	A&B - 50 C - 50	60	40
Receptions	1,200	400	550	150	500 Bal. - 100	300	220	160	80	60 60 60	120	50
Dinner Dance	450	-	300	-	250 Bal. - 100	-	100	80	50	- 40 -	-	-
Theatre Style	800 100/Boxes	150	400	-	400	-	100	70	40 20/Boxes	50 50 50	70	35
Schoolroom	320	75	240	-	200	70	60	70	40	30 30 20	35	20
U Shape	-	75	150	-	-	75	70	70	40	30 30 30	30	25
Dimensions	48'x82'	44'x52'	63'x70'	34'x55'	35'x57'	60'x40'	25'x60'	30'x57'	24'x42'	A&B - 18'x50' C - 19'x27'	23'x39'	18'x22'
Ceiling Ht.	25'6"	12'7"	12'7"	12'7"	12'7"	12'7"	13'3"	13'6"	13'	13' 13' 13'	13'6"	13'