

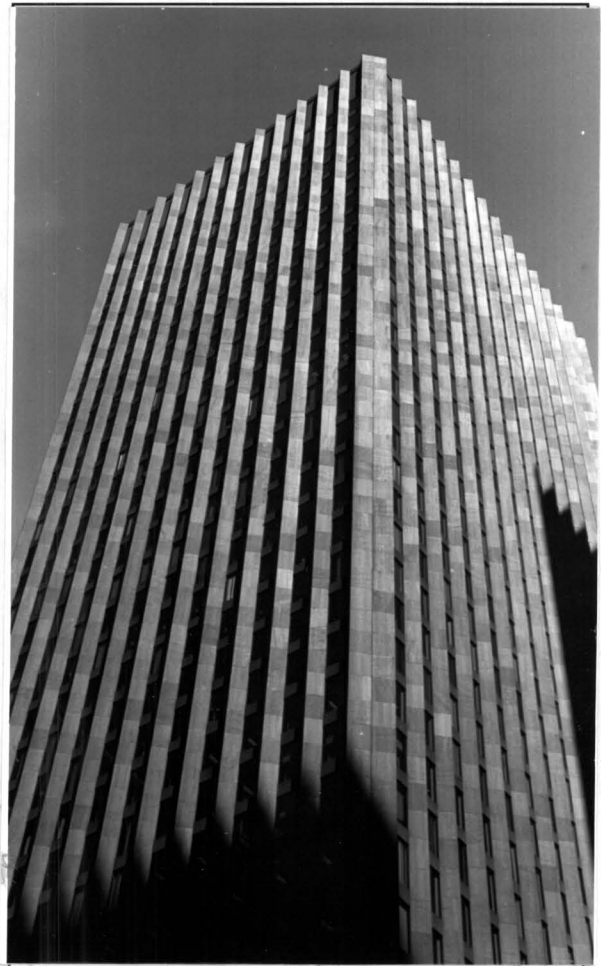
**CBS BUILDING**, 51 West 52nd Street, aka 51-69 West 52nd Street, 52-66 West 53rd Street, and 1300-1316 Sixth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1961-64; architects Eero Saarinen & Associates (design completed by Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo).

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1268, Lot 1 (excluding the portion of the lot subject to the Easement and Perpetual Maintenance Agreement between the 40 West 53rd Street Partnership and CBS Inc., made May 2, 1984, and described as Exhibit B).<sup>1</sup>

On September 16, 1997, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the CBS Building, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Six witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including a representative of CBS. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

#### Summary

The CBS Building was built in 1961-64 as the headquarters for one of America's three historic radio and television networks. The last completed work designed by architect Eero Saarinen, it is one of New York's premier post-World-War-II-era skyscrapers and one of the country's great works of modern architecture. Saarinen's goal was to build what he called "the simplest skyscraper in New York." At the height of the popularity of the steel-cage office building, Saarinen designed the CBS Building as New York's first postwar reinforced concrete skyscraper. The 38-story tower is sheathed in dark gray granite, with gray-tinted vision glass -- earning the building the sobriquet "Black Rock." When seen directly, the tower's bays appear open, with relatively narrow granite piers alternating with relatively narrow window bays of single sheets of plate glass, but when viewed from afar and necessarily at an angle, the V-shape of the piers effectively eclipses the view of the glass, creating the effect of a gray granite slab. The austerity of the tower derives in part from its dark gray color and the almost complete absence of interruptions in the facades. Saarinen placed the main entrances on West 52nd and West 53rd Streets, rather than on Sixth Avenue, creating the effect of an absolutely pure granite slab on Sixth Avenue. Ground floor commercial uses are set behind the gray glass, making them barely visible from outside. Eero Saarinen died suddenly in 1961, leaving to his office the task of supervising the construction of the CBS Building. Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo, among others, oversaw the completion of the project from 1961 to 1964. The building remains the corporate headquarters of CBS.



## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### William S. Paley and the Columbia Broadcasting System<sup>2</sup>

CBS traces its origins to the United Independent Broadcasters, a fledgling radio station network that was an early rival to NBC (the National Broadcasting Company), the network created by RCA's David Sarnoff. UIB incorporated in 1927, and, following its purchase later that year by the Columbia Phonograph Company, changed its name to the Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System, making its radio debut on September 18. When Columbia, unenthusiastic about future prospects, sold back the broadcasting rights to UIB's owners a few months later, the sale included permission to use the "Columbia" name -- hence the "Columbia Broadcasting System." In 1928, William S. Paley, connected by marriage to one of the company's owners, used half a million dollars from his portion of the proceeds from the sale of his family's Congress Cigar business to buy a 51 percent interest in the network. He took the title of president, and proceeded over the next half century to build CBS into one of the nation's major media conglomerates.

CBS's chief rival for its first several decades of existence remained the much larger NBC.<sup>3</sup> RCA's Sarnoff initially saw NBC as a free service intended to encourage the purchase of RCA-manufactured radios. Paley, with only radio programming to sell, focused on the promotion of radio advertising and the creation of saleable programs. By the end of 1928, CBS had 47 affiliates. Highlights of CBS's growth over the following years, from tiny upstart to major network, include the creation of CBS's news department; experiments in television broadcasting as early as 1931 (the first regularly scheduled in the nation, even though almost no one could watch); putting the young Bing Crosby on the radio in 1932, opposite NBC's *Amos 'n Andy*; broadcasting the *School of the Air* to some six million children starting in 1934; initiating the *Lux Radio Theater* in 1935, with Helen Hayes in its first offering; in 1936 bringing the popular Major Bowes' amateur hour to the radio, as well as comedians Burns and Allen, Eddie Cantor, and Ed Wynn, while at the same time inaugurating the *Columbia Workshop* for serious drama, including the works of W.H. Auden, Stephen Vincent Benet, Maxwell Anderson and Edna St. Vincent Millay; and the infamous 1938 broadcast of Orson Welles' production, "War of the Worlds." During World War II, CBS emerged as a major news broadcaster, led by foreign correspondents William L. Shirer and

Edward R. Murrow, with Charles Collingwood reporting on D-day from the Normandy beaches.

After the war ended, William S. Paley became chairman of the board, while his protégé Frank Stanton became president. CBS moved into television, broadcasting Arthur Godfrey, Ed Sullivan, *I Love Lucy*, and Walter Cronkite's series *You Are There*. In 1951, the CBS "eye" was developed as the network's television trademark. By the late 1950s, three decades after its founding, CBS had become firmly ensconced as a national institution. In 1966, the year following CBS's move into the new tower at 51 West 52nd Street, the corporation had over 17,000 employees, earned \$64.1 million, and had net sales of over \$800 million.

As early as 1929, while still in UIB's old offices in the Paramount Building, CBS had acquired Steinway Hall on West 57th Street for concert broadcasts. Later that year, Paley arranged the move to offices at 485 Madison Avenue. As early as 1935, CBS planned a new headquarters to designs by prominent modern architect William Lescaze, but it was never built. By the late 1950s, however, a diversifying CBS had grown enormously, acquiring interests in record manufacturing, television sets, musical instruments, publishing and a talent agency. The network invested in theatrical productions, and for a time owned the New York Yankees baseball team. CBS operations occupied space in a number of buildings scattered around Manhattan. Paley decided that the company's rented space on Madison Avenue was neither adequate to the network's needs nor helpful to its image, and determined to build a new headquarters that could compete in architectural prestige with NBC's headquarters at Rockefeller Center. In his words: "I think we were . . . determined that if we went ahead on our own building for CBS, it would have to be of the highest aesthetic quality obtainable."<sup>4</sup>

Paley thought Park Avenue had "too cold a feeling," and considered Madison Avenue "too narrow to display good architecture." Nothing was available on Fifth Avenue. He found a site on the east side of Sixth Avenue between West 52nd and West 53rd Streets, just two blocks west of the network's old Madison Avenue headquarters, and a few blocks north of NBC, in an area Paley characterized as "emerging as the newest important business area in midtown."<sup>5</sup> CBS bought the site in 1960, and hired Eero Saarinen, one of the most prestigious and best-known modern architects of the

day, to design the building. To Paley, “not only was he one of this country’s outstanding architects, he was also a creative artist in the deepest sense, and he won us over by the force of his personality, imagination and practicality.”<sup>6</sup>

#### Eero Saarinen Associates<sup>7</sup>

The American saga of the remarkable Saarinen family is framed by two skyscrapers, the Chicago Tribune Tower and the CBS Building. Eliel Saarinen’s second-prize entry in the Chicago Tribune Tower competition of 1922 had enormous influence on subsequent skyscraper design; its critical American success helped convince the Finnish architect to bring his family, including his son Eero, to the United States. Eero Saarinen’s CBS Building, the only skyscraper by either man to have been built, was completed only after its designer’s untimely death, and has become recognized as one of the country’s major monuments of modern skyscraper design.

A master architect of the mid-twentieth century, Eero Saarinen (1910-1961) was groomed from childhood to be a successful designer by his parents, textile artist Loja Gesellius Saarinen, and highly regarded international architect (Gottlieb) Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950). Eliel’s early career is best remembered for his Helsinki Railroad Station (1904-c.1913, with Herman Gesellius) which successfully demonstrates his sympathies with the Arts and Crafts movement. The Saarinen family immigrated to the United States in 1923, but visited Finland annually. Eliel contributed significantly to the creation of the Cranbrook School and Academy of Art, a complex of children’s schools and an advanced-level art academy, located at Bloomfield Hills, north of Detroit. Cranbrook was devoted to every field of design — textiles, metalwork, architecture, and city planning. Eliel designed several buildings there, including the Cranbrook School for Boys (1924-30) and the Kingswood School for Girls (1929-30). The latter project exemplifies the Arts and Crafts ideal of collaboration between the fine and applied arts: while Eliel oversaw all aspects of design, Loja designed and wove fabrics (in association with the Cranbrook Looms), Eero designed furniture, and his sister, Eva-Lisa, assisted with selecting wall and ceiling treatments.

During the early 1930s, Eero studied sculpture at the Parisian Academie de la Grand Chaumiére, completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the Beaux-Arts-oriented architecture program at Yale University, and toured Europe and Egypt on a travel fellowship, during which time he was influenced by

the architecture of Erich Mendelsohn and Alvar Aalto — before joining his father’s firm in 1936. Together, the Saarinens produced the much-praised Crow Island School (1939-40, with Perkins, Wheeler & Will) in Winnetka, Illinois. Eero entered many design competitions, and won several prizes. He collaborated with designer Charles O. Eames on the scheme for a molded plywood chair which won the Organic Design in Home Furnishings competition (1940-41), sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art. Recognized from that point on as an important furniture designer, Saarinen produced many designs for the Knoll furniture company, best represented by his Womb chair (1946-48) and Nos. 71 and 72 chair series (c.1956).

Eero Saarinen has been credited with developing the innovative “systems approach” to design; he carefully analyzed each problem, and usually relied on modern technology to find a unique form and structure to express a concept architecturally. As a result, each of his designs has a certain wholeness about it; he claimed to be concerned with the “esthetics of the whole organism” and sought an “expressive architecture, an antiassembly-line architecture,” stating “each building should be as distinctive as each person should.”<sup>8</sup> The commission which firmly established his architectural career was the General Motors Technical Center (1945-56, with Smith, Hinchman & Grylls) in Warren, Michigan. Though the initial designs for the Center were begun in association with his father, the final scheme was largely Eero’s. The complex is ruled by its strictly modular design (structure, partitions, and mechanical systems are fully integrated) and features such technological innovations as neoprene window gaskets and walls of thin insulated panels sheathed in porcelainized sheet metal; the architect also added brightly colored brick surfaces and his signature element, a reflecting pool. During the GM project, the elder Saarinen died and Eero formed a successor firm, Eero Saarinen & Associates. An intensely devoted and methodical worker — he worked 365 days a year, according to his chief of design, Kevin Roche — Eero produced a number of buildings which have become American landmarks. These include his Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (designed 1948, completed 1964), the famous parabolic arch in St. Louis, Missouri; the Kresge Auditorium and Chapel (1953-56, with Anderson & Beckwith), geometrically-derived enclosures highlighting different materials, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge; the David S. Ingalls Hockey Rink (1956-59), the undulating concrete

roof of which expresses the exhilaration of a hockey game, at Yale University in New Haven; and two soaring reinforced concrete masterpieces associated with flight: the Trans World Airlines Flight Center<sup>9</sup> (1956-62) at New York (now J.F.K.) International Airport — probably his most renowned design — and Dulles Airport (1958-62, with Ammann & Whitney) in Chantilly, Virginia. The last three commissions were completed after Saarinen's death in 1961, as was his other prominent New York project, the somber, granite-clad Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) Headquarters (1961-64) on Sixth Avenue between West 52nd and 53rd Streets.

Saarinen's buildings received extensive publicity in the press, and he was given several prestigious awards. Though many architects and architectural writers sympathetic to the International Style criticized Saarinen's work as lacking consistency, his *oeuvre* has withstood the test of time: by 1993, six of his designs had received the American Institute of Architects' 25-Year Award for "exemplif[ying] design of enduring significance." These include the Crow Island School, GM Technical Center, and Dulles Airport.<sup>10</sup> Saarinen's successor firm, Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo Associates, founded by his colleagues, has been a significant force in American architecture during the second half of this century.

### The CBS Building

Both Saarinen and Paley wanted a skyscraper that would differ from the established International Style of the 1950s represented by such New York towers as Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Lever House and Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building.<sup>11</sup> "After all," said Saarinen's widow Aline, "that's why they came to Eero and not to Skidmore."<sup>12</sup>

Saarinen experimented with models showing various possible shapes for the tower, ranging from the wedding-cake profile encouraged by then existing zoning laws to various square and rectangular towers rising from a plaza.<sup>13</sup> Saarinen eventually settled on a rectangular tower, as he wrote to Paley in March of 1961:

I think I now have a really good scheme for C.B.S. The design is the simplest conceivable rectangular free-standing sheer tower. The verticality of the tower is emphasized by the relief made by the triangular piers between the windows. These piers start at the pavement and soar

up 424 feet. Its beauty will be, I believe, that it will be the simplest skyscraper statement in New York.<sup>14</sup>

Paley later went out to Saarinen's office in Detroit to see a model, which he at first didn't like. On a second visit, however, Paley changed his mind: "I saw what I had first thought of as austerity really came through as strong, exquisite, ageless beauty. In July, 1961 I decided to go ahead with Saarinen."<sup>15</sup>

John Dinkeloo later said that Saarinen had been "especially excited about this design."<sup>16</sup> In Saarinen's words: "I wanted a building that would be a soaring thing. I think Louis Sullivan was right to want the skyscraper to be a soaring thing. I wanted a building that would stand firmly on the ground and would grow straight up. Your eyes should be led up to comprehend a building as a whole thing."<sup>17</sup>

After Saarinen's sudden death, Paley met with chief designer Kevin Roche, and decided to continue with the firm. Paley was an actively involved client. In the words of a contemporary critic, Eric Larrabee: "Where CBS left off and Saarinen began is now difficult to determine, especially since he was the kind of architect . . . who . . . cared less who got credit for an idea than whether his own ideas prevailed."<sup>18</sup> Of the building's completion, Paley wrote: "Participating in the creation of Black Rock was one of the great sources of satisfaction of my life."<sup>19</sup>

The premise of Saarinen's design, a freestanding tower in a plaza, was bound up in changes then being proposed to New York City's zoning laws. The 1916 zoning ordinance, in effect until 1961, had encouraged progressively set-back towers. The new ordinance encouraged tall towers set back in plazas. Saarinen met with the architects and planners working out the new zoning proposal, including Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and James Felt of the New York City Planning Commission, to explain the economics of his tower. CBS wasn't just one of the first towers to be built under the new zoning; Saarinen's designs and calculations for the tower actually helped shape the new regulations.<sup>20</sup> In the words of *New York Times* architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable, the CBS Building "set the shape and standard for New York building today."<sup>21</sup>

Saarinen designed the CBS Building as New York's first postwar skyscraper built of reinforced concrete.<sup>22</sup> Instead of an internal cage, from which to hang a seemingly weightless glass curtain wall, he designed exterior walls of triangular, weight-bearing

concrete piers, which together with the interior service and elevator core support the building. By using the piers, he emphasized its verticality. Instead of a flat facade, Saarinen made the concrete piers in a three-dimensional projecting triangular V-shape, with the glass recessed behind them. And instead of creating a transparent glass, shiny steel, or aluminum facade, he sheathed the concrete piers in dark gray granite, and filled in the intervening window bays with gray-tinted vision glass. Instead of the illusion of a glass box, he created the illusion of a slab of dark granite -- earning the building the sobriquet "Black Rock."

The five-foot widths of piers and window bays tied into the modular design of the entire structure. Each entrance on West 52nd and 53rd Street fit into one bay, and was planned with revolving doors, which required a minimum of five feet. Five-foot modules also met the needs of then standard office furniture arrangements.<sup>23</sup> The precise dimensions of pier and window were carefully adjusted. Roche did a series of mock-ups of the proposed building in New Rochelle, New York, and Paley wrote he "must have gone out to New Rochelle at least thirty times to study the various mock-ups . . . when Roche, Stanton and I went out to look at [the mock-up], we realized that the difference between the window area and the column area was not right. Your eye could tell you that. We started then to change it. We got down to talking about a quarter of an inch or a sixteenth of an inch. We must have put up five or six different-sized mock-ups before we finally got it right."<sup>24</sup>

The use of dark gray granite was proposed by Saarinen, but the final selection was made by his successors. His widow suggested that Saarinen was thinking of executives in dark gray suits.<sup>25</sup> Dinkeloo believed that dark stone projected strength better than glass.<sup>26</sup> Saarinen himself wrote: "A dark building seemed more quiet and dignified and appropriate to this site."<sup>27</sup> Paley recalls deciding in favor of true granite after rejecting a synthetic version, because "in the long run it would be worth it. The building would be built to last a hundred years. Granite would retain its beauty as long as the building stood." After examining granite from Africa, Japan, Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, and the United States, they settled on Canadian Black granite from the Robitaille family quarry in Alma, Quebec.<sup>28</sup>

Saarinen's triangular piers and modular design created a three-dimensional study in architectural illusion. From directly across Sixth Avenue, for example, the tower's bays appear open, with five-

foot-wide granite piers alternating with five-foot-wide window bays of single sheets of plate glass. When viewed from afar and necessarily at an angle, the V-shape of the piers effectively eclipses the view of the glass, creating the effect of a gray granite slab. The bays of any of the building's four sides thus appear to open directly in front of a viewer but appear to close up like a vertical Venetian blind to the right or left. As the viewer walks along the sidewalk, the bays appear to open and close in succession, rather like an accordion (as contemporary critics remarked). This optical effect was described by one contemporary writer as "trompe l'oeil,"<sup>29</sup> and by another as "op-arch."<sup>30</sup> Saarinen, describing the effect in motion, wrote: "We had learned the way a changing relief gives life to a facade."<sup>31</sup>

The austerity of the CBS Building derives in part from the almost complete absence of interruptions in the facades. There are no setbacks. The main entrances on the side streets are through doors set discreetly within bays and integrated into the facade's design. Saarinen created the effect of a pure glass and granite slab on Sixth Avenue. The commercial spaces at the ground floor, set behind gray glass, are rendered practically invisible from outside, with very discreet signage.<sup>32</sup>

Though he put the CBS Building in a sunken plaza, Saarinen tried in some measure to respect the street wall of Sixth Avenue, keeping the plaza small and siting the tower a little off-center. In the architect's words:

We tried to place the building on the site so that we could have a plaza and still not destroy the street line. A tower should not be tied in with lower street buildings. It should stand alone with air and light around it. A plaza is a very necessary thing in a city. It lets people sit in the sun and look at the sky. A plaza allows a building to be seen. Our buildings should be seen, because they are monuments of our time. But . . . we have to remember the street line and we have to remember the space between is as important as the towers. These arrangements should be orderly and beautiful.<sup>33</sup>

### Critical Reaction

CBS staff started moving into the new building at the end of 1964.<sup>34</sup> That same year, the Architectural League of New York cited the building as one of eight recent CBS projects across the country built to high architectural standards, and

awarded a medal to CBS president Frank Stanton for “significant contributions and effective encouragement of the role of the arts in business and industry.”<sup>35</sup> Reporting on the award, the *New York Times* wrote: “Seeking to promote its corporate image, Columbia insisted on high architectural standards and employed some of the country’s leading architects to achieve them.”<sup>36</sup>

The following year, CBS won a Bronze Plaque from New York’s Municipal Art Society for “an outstanding example of architecture befitting the city of New York.” Stanton, accepting the award, explained: “The things we build should be beautiful for no better reason than man has created them as part of his work and places them beside the creation of nature as part of his life. The only goal for men who build should be to make nothing that is less than beautiful. In planning for the building, the one controlling idea from the outset was that we wanted a building actively, insistently, inexorably on the cutting edge in the evolution of the skyscraper.”<sup>37</sup>

Critical reaction has varied somewhat, but the CBS Building has been generally accepted as one of New York’s premier post-World-War-II-era skyscrapers and one of the country’s great works of modern architecture. Even before its completion, the *Times* wrote that, “if buildings were rated like television programs, the Columbia Broadcasting System would have a new hit.”<sup>38</sup>

The CBS Building represented a departure from the International Style, and some critics didn’t understand that. Some thought that the building’s piers did not explicitly express their function -- an important concept in International Style design -- because they didn’t narrow towards the top (where they supported less weight than at the bottom).<sup>39</sup> Yet others praised the piers as “directly expressed from plaza to sky, rather than concealed behind curtain walls as in neighboring office buildings.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Saarinen’s biographer, Allan Temko, writing in 1962, faulted the tower for not growing “visually more open and light as it rises,” and commented that though it had a plaza, the plaza was “scarcely more than a protective border for the freestanding tower, and is in no sense a real civic space.”<sup>41</sup> Temko opined that if Saarinen had had the opportunity to design additional skyscrapers, they would have overcome such weaknesses, making his untimely death “one of the cultural disasters of modern times.”

Critic Bethami Probst, unhappy that the tower didn’t “soar,” compared it unfavorably with the Seagram Building (“If Seagram is the Rolls Royce of recent skyscrapers, CBS must be content with

being in the Bentley class (which is by no means bad”). Nevertheless, in the critic’s final judgment, “CBS is a building to be reckoned with, a powerful, brooding presence.”<sup>42</sup>

David Jacobs described the impact of the opening-closing facades on a “fascinated” public: “They stroll back and forth, walk slowly then quickly, back and forth again, playing peek-a-boo.” Though he found the CBS Building “impersonal and forbidding, and from close by, downright overwhelming,” he noted that European cathedrals were overwhelming too, and he judged the building “a marvelous contribution to the city of New York, a splendid monument to the business of communications and the art of architecture.”<sup>43</sup>

Ada Louise Huxtable, writing in 1966, thought the public was less favorable to the building than the critics: “The dark dignity that appeals to architectural sophisticates puts off the public, which tends to reject it as funereal,” ascribing this fault to the corruption of “the public eye” which “takes bright and shiny as synonymous with new and good.” Huxtable herself judged CBS “a building, in the true, classic sense: a complete design in which technology, function and esthetics are conceived and executed integrally for its purpose.” She faulted the building’s interior for being out of character with the exterior (it was not designed by Saarinen or his successor firm), but ultimately found the CBS Building a “first-rate work of architecture” and “an extraordinarily impressive structure.”<sup>44</sup>

### Description

The CBS Building is a freestanding, 38-story reinforced-concrete tower, sheathed in dark gray granite and gray-tinted vision glass, rising straight up 490 feet without setbacks. The tower, with a 135-foot by 160-foot footprint, is placed within a sunken plaza that occupies the entire western end of the block bounded by Fifth and Sixth Avenues and West 52nd and 53rd Streets on a site that is 200 feet-10 inches by 216 feet-10 inches. The tower occupies approximately 60 percent of the plaza’s area and is set slightly towards the east. The plaza is set five steps (approximately three and a half feet) below the sidewalk level at Sixth Avenue, six steps below on West 52nd Street, seven steps below on West 53rd Street, and slopes downward to the east.

The building is rectangular in plan, with twelve bays on the eastern and western facades and fifteen bays on the wider northern and southern facades. Each facade is composed of five-foot-wide piers faced in “Canadian Black” granite flanking large, five-foot-wide panes of glass framed in bronze-

finished aluminum. The windows are 19 feet-10 inches high on the ground floor above bronze-finished aluminum sills, and nine feet high on the upper floors. At the first level above the ground floor, instead of glass the bays contain grilles. The profile of each pier is a projecting triangular or V-shape; at each of the building's four corners the "V"s meet to form double-width piers, creating the effect of chamfered corners. Ground floor commercial uses behind gray glass are rendered practically invisible from outside.

There is no entrance to the CBS Building on Sixth Avenue. The building has fourteen ground floor entrances, seven on both West 52nd and West 53rd Streets. The entrances, containing three door types, are fitted unobtrusively into the narrow bays. The entrances in the seven central bays on the West 52nd Street side are arranged as follows from west to east: 1) A single-door entry, flanked by side-lights, providing entrance to the commercial space; above it is a simple, modestly projecting light box. 2) A double-door entry with a simple, modestly projecting light box above. 3, 4, 5) Each has a revolving door with a simple, modestly projecting light box above with the raised letters "CBS." 6) A double-door entry with a simple, modestly projecting light box above. 7) A double-door entry with a simple, modestly projecting light box above, serving as entrance to a restaurant; there is a second simple, modestly projecting light box above, at the top of the bay. Discreet lettering on several windows identifies the restaurant. The single doors, double doors, revolving doors and their housings, and projecting light boxes are all of the same bronze-finished aluminum.

There are seven entrances and one window bay in the central bays on the West 53rd Street side, arranged as follows from west to east: 1) A double-door entry to the commercial space, with a simple, modestly projecting light box. 2) A double-door entry with a simple, modestly projecting light box above. 3, 4, 5) Revolving-door entrances with simple, modestly projecting light boxes above with the raised letters "CBS." 6) A double-door entry with a simple, modestly projecting light box above. 7) A window of the restaurant, with a simple, modestly projecting light box above it and

an additional simple, modestly projecting light box at the top of the bay. 8) A double-door entrance to the restaurant, with an angled projecting marquee with backlit letters indicating the restaurant's name, "China Grill." The material of the doors and light boxes is the same as that used on West 52nd Street.

At the east elevation, the ground floor bays are as follows from south to north: 1, 2, 3) Glass windows. 4, 5, 6) Bronze-finished aluminum with a double door. 7) Bronze-finished aluminum with a grille. 8) Bronze-finished aluminum. 9) A glass double door, with bronze-finished aluminum above. 10,11,12) Glass windows for the restaurant. There are simple, modestly projecting light boxes in the 2nd, 5th, 8th and 11th bays.

The plaza is paved in a gray granite slightly lighter than that on the building's piers. The plaza is sunken below street level, forming a gray granite retaining wall with parapets and vertical slits on the inside faces. Wide steps lead down to the plaza from each street side; a narrower staircase with eight steps leads down to the plaza from the east. Each set of steps has two freestanding bronze-finished aluminum railings. A ramp (not original) with a dark bronze-finished aluminum handrail has been added to the steps from West 52nd Street. The ends of the parapets above the retaining walls have polished bronze letters and numerals (replacements of the original) flanking the steps: "CBS" on Sixth Avenue, "51" for the address on West 52nd Street, and "52" for the address on West 53rd Street. Planters with trees have been placed in the plaza, planters with bushes have been placed on the parapets of the retaining wall. At the eastern end of the plaza, the retaining wall has been enlarged, and includes a wheelchair-access ramp (a later addition), and a staircase leading down to a "messenger entrance." A portion of the tax lot has been excluded from the Landmark Site and has been re-landscaped as part of the plaza for the adjacent building to the east.<sup>45</sup>

Report prepared by  
Anthony W. Robins  
Director of Special Projects

## NOTES

1. The Easement and Perpetual Maintenance Agreement has been filed with the New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Reel 789, pages 1789-1803. Exhibit B is on page 1796. This is subsequent to a Declaration between CBS, Inc., and 40 West 53rd Associates, made Dec. 16, 1983, Reel 746, pages 475-497. Here the parcel is described as Exhibit E, pages 494 and 495.
2. The following summary of the history of CBS is based on: Robert Slater, *This is CBS: A Chronicle of 60 Years* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1988); Robert Metz, *CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye* (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1975); and William S. Paley, *As It Happened: A Memoir* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1979).
3. ABC didn't become a major network until later.
4. Paley, 342.
5. This stretch of Sixth Avenue was in the throes of a skyscraper building boom, beginning in 1958, which over the next five years brought more than a dozen major skyscrapers to the blocks between 46th and 57th Streets. See "14 Major Postwar Buildings Rise From 46th to 57th Street," *New York Times*, October 6, 1963, section 8, p. 1.
6. Paley, 343.
7. All but the first paragraph of this section was originally written for the Landmarks Commission's "Trans World Airlines Flight Center (now TWA Terminal A) At New York International Airport" designation report, prepared by Betsy Bradley of the Research Department. It is based on: Allan Temko, *Eero Saarinen* (New York: George Braziller, 1962); Walter McQuade, "Eero Saarinen, A Complete Architect," *Architectural Forum* 116 (April 1962), 102-107; Rupert Spade, introduction to *Eero Saarinen*, Library of Contemporary Architects (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971); "Slouching towards Barcelona," *Progressive Architecture* 56 (Feb. 1975), 78-85; Andrea O. Dean, "Eero Saarinen in Perspective," *A.I.A. Journal* 70 (Nov. 1981), 36-51; R. Craig Miller, "Saarinen, Eliel, and Saarinen, Eero," *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (New York: Macmillan-The Free Press, 1982), vol. 3, 625-633; *Design in America. The Cranbrook Vision, 1925-1950* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983); "Eero Saarinen," *Architecture and Urbanism* extra edition (1984); and Peter Papademetriou, "Coming of Age. Eero Saarinen and Modern American Architecture," *Perspecta* 21 (1984), 116-141.
8. Quoted in McQuade, 107.
9. The building is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.
10. "Saarinen's GM Technical Center Receives AIA's 25-Year Award," *Architecture: the AIA Journal* 74 (Apr. 1985), 11, 15; "Eero Saarinen's Dulles Airport Wins AIA 25-Year Award," *Architecture: the AIA Journal* 77 (May 1988), 38, 43; "Deere HQ Wins Saarinen a Sixth 25-Year Award," *Progressive Architecture* 74 (Feb. 1993), 18.
11. Both are designated New York City Landmarks; interiors of the Seagram Building, including the Four Seasons Restaurant, are also designated Interior Landmarks.
12. Aline B. Saarinen, quoted in Eric Larrabee, "Saarinen's Dark Tower: The CBS Building and How It Grew," *Harper's* 229 (December 1964), 58, cited in Stern.
13. McQuade, 114.
14. Paley, 343. A variant version was published in *Eero Saarinen - On His work with Statements by the Architect*, edited by Aline B. Saarinen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 16, in which the height is given as "491 feet" instead of "424 feet."
15. Paley, 343.
16. John Dinkeloo, quoted in "Saarinen's Sophisticated Skyscraper for CBS," *Progressive Architecture*, 42 (Oct. 1961), 53.



17. *Eero Saarinen - On His Work*, 16.
18. Cited in Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), 406-408.
19. Paley, 345.
20. McQuade, 113: “[Saarinen] established that the area per floor would have to be near 20,000 square feet gross for an economical structure (in contrast to Seagram’s 16,000 square feet on tower floors). The proposed new zoning would still have permitted only 16,000 square feet, but, working together, the city planners and architects came out with a new formula which would yield the right square footage and produce a pleasant plaza for the city.”
21. Ada Louise Huxtable, “Eero Saarinen’s Somber Skyscraper,” *New York Times*, March 13, 1966, section 2, p. 27.
22. The concrete piers represented a technical advance. Saarinen’s engineer, Paul Weidlinger, was reported to have said, “too many people were saying ‘it cannot be done’ and we were itching to show them.” (“Saarinen’s Skyscraper,” *Architectural Record* 138 [July 1965], 113) More than just forming the building’s facades, the piers serve as a critical piece of its structural support. And above the first floor, they are hollowed out to serve as ducts for the building’s systems. Saarinen wrote: “We arrived at the triangular piers after much study of other shapes. This shape emphasized verticality most strongly. It best combined mechanical and structural requirements. It was a simple shape to be clad in granite. It kept the glass area to a reasonable minimum.” Concrete was more expensive than steel, so Saarinen worked on both a concrete and a steel design; when the rising price of steel finally exceeded that of concrete, they went with the concrete design. (McQuade, 113.) Though official figures were not released, Dinkeloo was quoted as saying CBS cost less to build than such contemporary towers as the Seagram Building, Chase Manhattan Plaza, and the Union Carbide Building. According to Paley, “the cost per square foot is well within the limits we set,” said to be about \$40 million. (Bethami Probst, “CBS: Somber Power on Sixth Avenue,” *Progressive Architecture* 46 [July 1965], 189.)
23. “Saarinen’s Skyscraper,” 115.
24. Paley, 344.
25. Probst, 189.
26. Probst, 189.
27. *Eero Saarinen - On His Work*, 16.
28. Paley, 344. The granite was then subjected to a special treatment, as described in a contemporary account: “Since no one wanted polished stone, and since granite lightens when fractured, they worked out a completely new method to get the best of both worlds: thermal stippling under a 5000° flame provided the roughness, then a technique borrowed from the aircraft industry -- liquid honing with a slurry of spherical glass beads and water -- restored the stone’s darkness.” (Probst, 189.)
29. Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Tall Building Artistically Reconsidered* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 72.
30. Probst, 189.
31. *Eero Saarinen - On His Work*, 16.
32. The original restaurant, “The Ground Floor Restaurant,” was meant to be a counterpoint to the “Four Seasons Restaurant” in the Seagram Building, but never achieved comparable success. (Stern, *New York 1960*, 410.) Today the space is occupied by the “China Grill.”
33. *Eero Saarinen - On His Work*, 16.
34. Paley, 345.
35. “CBS Undertakes 8 Building Projects,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1964, section 8, p. 1.

36. The other CBS projects included work by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Minoru Yamasaki, and William Lescaze.
37. Reported in the "Octagon Observer," *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* 44 (Aug. 1965), 22.
38. Peter Franklin, "Reinforced Concrete Building for C.B.S. Gets Rave Reviews," *New York Times*, March 15, 1964, section 8, p. 1.
39. Stern, 408.
40. "Saarinen's Skyscraper," 113.
41. Temko, 120-121.
42. Probst, 189.
43. David Jacobs, "Saarinen's CBS Skyscraper," *Holiday* 39 (June 1966), 122.
44. Huxtable, "Eero Saarinen's Somber Skyscraper," 27-28. Most writers emphasized how architecturally superior CBS was to the Sixth Avenue skyscrapers surrounding it. Peter Blake wrote: "One may argue about the precise detailing of CBS; but there can be no argument over the fact that this is really a BUILDING, not speculative cubage wrapped in exterior wallpaper. . . . by its very presence, it offers a mute but unmistakable commentary on the slaughter on Sixth Avenue, the slaughter that is our cities today." (Peter Blake, "Slaughter on 6th Avenue," *Architectural Forum* 122 [June 1965], 13-19.) He was echoed by Walter McQuade in the same journal: "When the CBS tower is completed, its siting will probably make it the focus of its neighborhood of massive new commercial buildings, making most of them look like weak brutes. It will be that rare event, a New York office building with a strong identity." (McQuade, 114.)
45. See note 1 above.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the CBS Building has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the CBS Building is one of the most distinguished post-World War II skyscrapers in New York City; that it was built in 1961-1964 as the headquarters for CBS, one of America's three historic radio and television networks; that it was the last completed work designed by architect Eero Saarinen, one of the nation's most prestigious and best-known modern architects; that following Saarinen's sudden death in 1961, the design was carried to completion by his associates Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo, among others; that Saarinen designed the CBS Building as New York's first postwar skyscraper built of reinforced concrete, sheathing the tower in Canadian Black granite, with gray-tinted vision glass, earning the building the sobriquet "Black Rock"; that the use of continuous reinforced concrete piers in the facades, as load-bearing elements supporting the building, was a major engineering innovation, and emphasized the tower's verticality; that Saarinen's work on the CBS Building and his consultations with zoning experts helped shape New York's 1961 zoning ordinance, and thereby had an enormous influence on the future of New York skyscrapers; that, though set in a sunken plaza, the CBS Building deliberately attempts to respect the street-wall of Sixth Avenue; that the triangular piers and narrow windows of the CBS Building create a shifting architectural effect, ranging from open glass tower to gray granite slab, the piers appearing to open and close as a visitor moves along the sidewalk; that the tower's austerity derives in part from the almost complete absence of setbacks or other interruptions in the facades, with main entrances placed only on East 52nd and East 53rd Streets, and commercial uses rendered largely invisible by the dark gray glass; and that the CBS Building has been critically recognized as one of the country's great works of modern architecture.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the CBS Building, 51 West 52nd Street, aka 51-69 West 52nd Street, 52-66 West 53rd Street, and 1300-1316 Sixth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1268, Lot 1 (excluding the portion of the lot subject to the Easement and Perpetual Maintenance Agreement between the 40 West 53rd Street Partnership and CBS Inc., made May 2, 1984, and described as Exhibit B), as its Landmark Site.



CBS Building, 51 West 52nd Street, aka 51-69 West 52nd Street, 52-66 West 53rd Street, and 1300-1316 Sixth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan.

*Photo: Carl Forster*



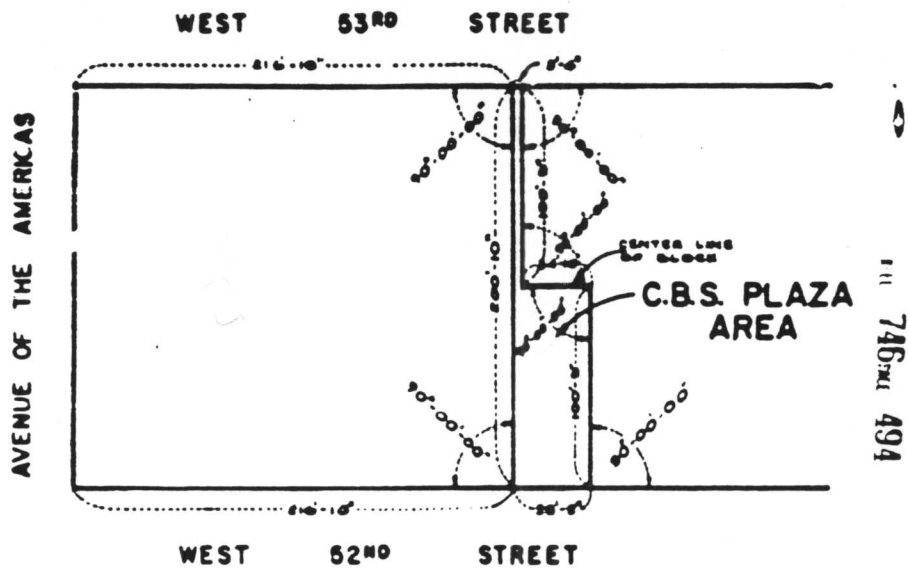
CBS Building, 51 West 52nd Street, Manhattan.  
*Photo: Carl Forster*



CBS Building, 51 West 52nd Street, Manhattan.  
Detail of base. *Photo: Carl Forster*



CBS Building, 51 West 52nd Street, Manhattan.  
Detail of facade. *Photo: Carl Forster*



**EXHIBIT "E"**  
**C.B.S. PLAZA AREA**

NOTE: THERE ARE EASEMENTS AFFECTING THIS  
 PARCEL WHICH ARE NOT SHOWN

PREPARED OCT 10, 1988  
**EARL B. LOVELL - S.P. BELCHER, INC.**

*Benjamin D. Goldberg*

CITY SURVEYOR  
 71 HUDSON ST.

VIC. REGISTRAR  
 NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

5-1051  
 8 OF 1

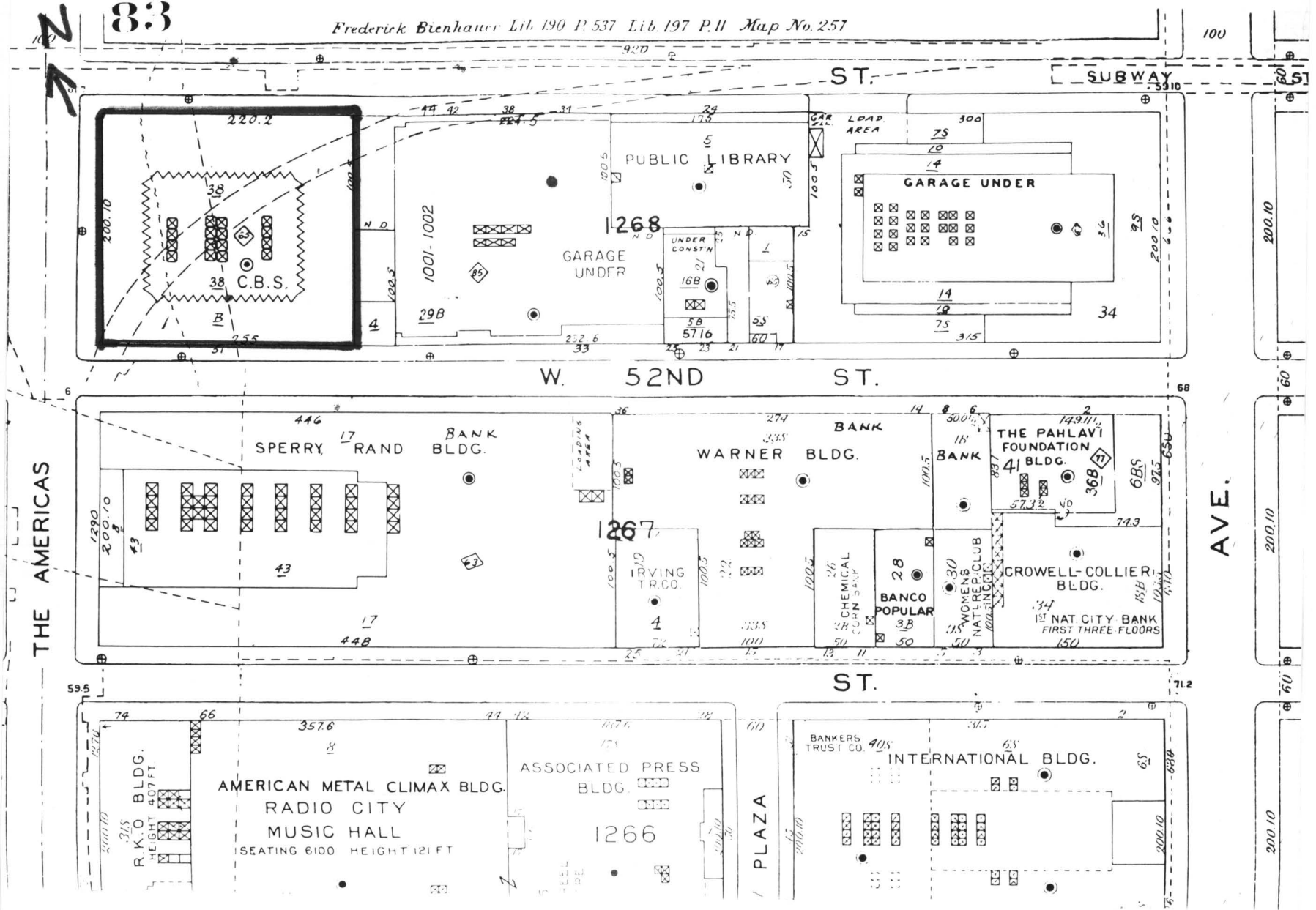
CBS Building, 51 West 52nd Street, aka 51-69 West 52nd Street, 52-66 West 53rd Street, and 1300-1316 Sixth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan.  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1268, Lot 1 (excluding the portion of the lot subject to the Easement and Perpetual Maintenance Agreement between the 40 West 53rd Street Partnership and CBS Inc., made May 2, 1984, and described as Exhibit B). The excluded portion is shown here as the C.B.S. Plaza area. See Note 1 for filing information.





83

Frederick Bienhauer Lib 190 P. 537 Lib. 197 P. II Map No. 257



CBS Building  
 Source: Sanborn, *Manhattan Land Book* (1996-97), pl. 77