



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

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COMMISSIONERS APPROVE LANDMARK DESIGNATION FOR MORSE BUILDING IN LOWER MANHATTAN, ONCE ONE OF THE TALLEST IN NYC

Former Office Tower Distinguished by Deep Red and Glazed Black Brickwork Housed One of the Nation's First Motion Picture Companies

The Landmarks Preservation Commission today unanimously designated the Morse Building at 140 Nassau St. as a New York City landmark, marking the second time in nearly two months that the Commission granted protective status to a building in Lower Manhattan. The structure, designed by Benjamin Silliman and James Farnsworth, originally stood at eight stories -- excluding a raised basement and an attic -- and was one of the city's tallest buildings when construction was completed in 1880.



Located just east of City Hall at the intersection of Beekman and Nassau streets in the former heart of the City's newspaper industry, the Morse Building features an intricate façade made of deep red and black brick terra cotta that combines elements of Gothic and neo-Grec styles, as well the "Rundbogenstil," a German eclectic, mid-19th century style that combines Romanesque and Renaissance elements and is characterized by arcaded, round arches.

"For about 20 years, this building was actually one of the tallest in the city," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "But it wasn't long before it was eclipsed by structures more than twice its height. Still, the Morse Building stands out as a reminder of how fast building techniques and designs were developing back then."

G. Livingston Morse and Sidney E. Morse, both nephews of the famed inventor and creator of the electric telegraph, Samuel F.B. Morse, constructed the building for approximately \$200,000. The "fireproof" building included 175 offices, two hydraulic Otis elevators, steam heat, gas lighting and fireplaces. A notable early tenant was Vitagraph Co., one of the first American motion picture companies, which leased space in the building from 1896 to 1900. The company filmed "The Burglar on the Roof," a one-minute silent movie by J. Stuart Blackton, on a rooftop studio in 1898.



*King's Handbook of
New York, 1892*

In 1900-02, the two top floors were reconstructed and four were added in a neo-Classical style designed by William P. Bannister and Richard M. Schell, bringing the building to 14 stories. The two lower floors were remodeled during a 1965 renovation that involved the removal of a 10th story balcony.

The building was converted to apartments in 1980, and its designation comes shortly after the Commission's decision on July 25, 2006 to designate the nearby AT&T Building at 195 Broadway, between Dey and Fulton streets.

The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission is the largest municipal preservation agency in the United States. Since its creation in 1965, the Commission has designated nearly 23,000 buildings in all five boroughs, including 1,143 individual landmarks, 107 interior landmarks, nine scenic landmarks and 85 historic districts.