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Two New York City Buildings, both Integral to the History of the Engineering Profession, Listed on National Register of Historic Places

Turn-of-Century Adjoining Building in Midtown Manhattan, built by Andrew Carnegie, earn federal designation for historical significance

September 19, 2007 ... New York, NY ... The elegant adjoining buildings at 28-36 West 40th Street and 23-33 West 39th Street that were the focal point of the nation's early engineering profession have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The announcement was made today by the Trust for Architectural Easements (www.architecturaltrust.org) (formerly the National Architectural Trust), which was instrumental in supporting the nomination of the buildings for the important designation.

"These two buildings are a landmark to the growth of America's industrial society," said Steve McClain, president of the Trust for Architectural Easements. "The engineering profession is intimately connected with the growth of the United States into a major industrial and economic power. At a time when the engineering profession was profoundly impacting the development of our nation, the focus of that activity was here. Today's federal designation is well deserved."

A prominent New York architectural historian, Anthony Robins of Thompson & Columbus, wrote the report nominating the buildings to the National Register of Historic Places. The report was submitted to and affirmed by the New York State Historic Preservation Office, which officially submitted the nomination to the National Park Service, the administrator of the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1904, steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie gifted \$1.5 million to build a headquarters for the burgeoning engineering societies, as well as the Engineers' Club, a social club of the variety growing increasingly prominent in New York at the time. The move was consistent with his focus on building not only libraries, but also constructing buildings for organizations that performed other educational or scientific functions. And, he had a personal connection to the engineering profession because of his leadership in the steel industry.

He and the involved professional organizations decided upon two distinct buildings, one for the Engineers' Club, and the other as a combined headquarters for three different engineering societies: the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and the American Institute of Mining Engineers. The two buildings – the West 39th



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Street location for the Engineers' Club and the West 40th Street location for engineering societies – were to be interconnected for purpose and function, but each was to be architecturally distinct.

For more than 60 years, the two buildings served as the epicenter of the American engineering profession. The engineering societies occupied the space until 1957. The Engineers' Club remained at the location until 1979. Today the Engineers' Club building contains cooperative apartments. The Engineering Societies' Building has since served as a photographic arts center, and a design headquarters for clothing designer Tommy Hilfiger.

“Architects Whitfield & King (Engineers' Club) and Hale and Morse (Engineering Societies' Building) created designs that matched the buildings' separate functions: a stylish club building facing Bryant Park, and a more subdued, though still elegant, professional headquarters on West 39th Street,” said Anthony Robins. “The location too reflects the dual use: near other social clubs, but also just across the street from the city's grand new Public Library – supplementing the Club's unparalleled engineering library. Together, the two newly listed buildings stand as handsome reminders of the role that engineering has played in the creation of New York City – inconceivable without the engineering triumphs of its bridges, subways, water works and skyscrapers.”

“The National Register of Historic Places is the federal program that provides public recognition of our nation's historic resources, whether those be architectural, cultural, or archaeological” said Heather Massler, an architectural historian and Director of Operations and Stewardship at the Trust for Architectural Easements. “The listing of a property is significant because, in addition to honoring a property's history, it means consideration of the property in the planning for federal undertakings, eligibility for federal tax benefits, and qualification for federal historic preservation grants, when funds are available. It's an important piece of the voluntary preservation puzzle.”

To inquire about the Trust for Architectural Easements activities and work in Midtown Manhattan, please contact Dan Reardon at dreardon@architecturaltrust.org, or 212-213-1525.

About the Trust for Architectural Easements

The Trust for Architectural Easements advocates voluntary preservation through its support of the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive Program. As the leading nonprofit historic preservation organization in the nation committed to this Program, the Trust is dedicated to championing preservation efforts that protect America's architectural heritage for future generations.

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