



**The
Architecture
and Art
of the
National
Broadcasting
Company
(NBC)
Network
Radio Studios
1926-1991**

**By
Ronald Kramer**

The Architecture and Art of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) Network Radio Studios

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Cover Art — Cardboard microphone used as a ticket for members of the public purchasing a tour of NBC Radio City New York. These tickets were used between the mid-1930s and approximately 1960. [Collection of Ronald Kramer]

A New Industry...A Striking Vision

When radio began in the early 1920s, it involved Rube Goldberg technology and was generally hastily exercised from non-descript store front studios in much the same way that motion pictures had first been shown in nickelodeon storefronts on dropped white sheets. And just as motion pictures graduated from utilitarian storefronts to evolve the grand architecture of the movie palaces building in the 1920s, the burgeoning radio industry developed a need for studio quarters befitting the industry's growing stature.

The most significant step in radio's evolution to that prominence occurred in 1926 when the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) came into existence as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) upon RCA's purchase of the broadcasting properties of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T). Using its long distance telephone circuits, in 1924 AT&T had founded the United States' first radio network by linking several radio stations the company owned. Just two years later, AT&T concluded that broadcast operations were too different and problematic compared to the company's central telephone business and decided to exit radio. It sale of the AT&T radio network, and its radio stations (WEAF, New York, and WCAP, Washington D.C.) to RCA, allowed that company to form a broadcasting division, which it called the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), to operate these properties. RCA had previously, and generally unsuccessfully, attempted to operate its own radio network in competition with AT&T by linking the RCA-owned stations using telegraph circuits. However, RCA's purchase of the AT&T radio property allowed the new NBC to combine the AT&T network with its own, using AT&T leased circuits for both networks, which were then respectively renamed the NBC Red and Blue networks. Supposedly, the colors derived from a map on which an engineer was hastily sketching the newly formed network's line structure using hose two colors to differentiate between the two networks and their respective local radio stations.

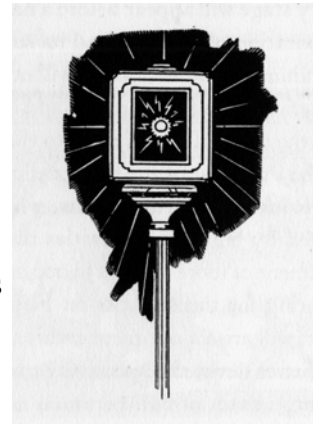
RCA's vice-president and general manager at the time was David Sarnoff, who eventually became that company's president and chairman. Sarnoff's background in radio dated back to the days of "wireless" telegraphy and he was, throughout his career, a spearhead of technological progress in electronic communication. Much of the development of television in America resulted from Sarnoff's dogged pursuit of "radio with pictures." Sarnoff also spearheaded the development of color television and propelled RCA into the role of a major equipment manufacturer. In contrast to William Paley, who founded the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in 1927, Sarnoff essentially saw himself as an industrialist where Paley was more consumed with artistic endeavor and the programming side of radio.

The architectural style which NBC gradually evolved for its



studio properties developed alongside parallel artistic and architectural development. Some of the resulting structures involved imprecisely attributed architectural styles definitions for which aren't generally agreed upon and, as a result, these buildings have been variously identified as having being conceived with differing styles including *art deco*, *art moderne*, *streamline moderne* (sometimes rendered as *streamline modern*) and *industrial modern*. Since this is the only publication which has sought to collect, identify, picture and analyze the various NBC studio properties, I also hope to help minimize that confusion.

The term *art deco* is generally credited to a style which originated at the great Paris *L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* from which *art deco* derives its name. The resulting French high style, which involved rich colors, bold geometric shapes and decorative splendor, was applied to both architecture and consumer line products and was considered quite *avant garde* in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It was distinguished from its predecessor, *art nouveau*, by its use of hard-edged, mechanical elements as opposed to art deco's flowing, natural forms. *Art deco* was, as a result of its "flash" and high level of ornamentation, was seen as more modern and ideally suited to the Jazz Age of the 1920s.



Essentially contemporaneous with the emergence of *art deco*, another loosely styled architectural branch was developing under the name *moderne* design. The style was a response to society's increasingly early twentieth century industrial structure and used a lack of adornment along with a fascination with the complex mechanics of evolving technology. The style often used poured concrete but featured rectilinear patterns and extreme simplicity in design along with somewhat minimalist ornamentation.



[above] Greyhound terminal, Greenwood, MS
[below] Streamline Moderne Pioneer Zephyr train, 1936



Art deco and *moderne* blended in architecture for the transportation industries, bus, train and gas stations, airline terminals, trains, buses and the like. The concept of motion, however, was carried into these projects with flowing lines which often curved over a long expanse – thus conveying the sense of "motion." Borrowing some elements from *art deco* and others from this modified

adaptation of industrial design, the resulting style was alternatively called either *streamline moderne* (or *streamline modern*) or *art moderne*. The major element which defined *streamline* as distinct from *art moderne* was the greater accentuation of the former's flowing "motion" or "speed" lines as they were called by Walter Dorwin Teague.

Radio virtually defined its era in much the same way that the post-World War II period was defined as the “atomic era” and the late twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries have been called the “digital era.” The term “radio” was broadly applied to a wide variety of products, such as flour, razor blades, cleanser and similar household products seeking to connect them to the bold, modern “flash” that “radio” connoted. Thus, architecture for radio structures afforded an interesting opportunity connect one of the era’s most influential technologies, a heritage of the *modern industrial* machine age with its symbolism of towers and electricity, with the *art deco* world of culture and the *streamline moderne* symbolism of radio’s pervasive, invisible atmospheric “motion” that miraculously connected all peoples.

NBC’s birth also drew architectural direction from new technology. For most of the period prior to the dawn of the 20th century, architecture had revolved around largely horizontal structures with the sole exception of churches, whose verticality searched for proximity to the heavens. The invention of safe elevators and steel structure buildings made “skyscraper” designs feasible and, for the first time, commercial applications challenged religious structures in seeking the heavens. Radio, by its nature, traveled in the lofty atmosphere and so it likely wasn’t accidental that NBC installed virtually all of its regional production centers in high-rise skyscrapers, often on their uppermost floors. Perhaps radio seemed uniquely worthy of such elevation to David Sarnoff. NBC’s sole exception to placing its studios atop buildings which ranked among the nation’s tallest structures was to be Radio City Hollywood — a building which celebrated its horizontality just as southern California, itself, seemed to appreciate its sprawling use of abundantly available land.

Just as the art deco era was dawning, NBC began operation on November 15, 1926 from hastily assembled New York studios in the American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) Building which was located at 195 Broadway and West 42nd Street. AT&T apparently provided NBC a short-term lease of a studio (described in a New York Landmarks Preservation Commission monograph as “a single little room”) as part of the sale of its broadcast properties to RCA, from which NBC was formed. In the July, 1928 *Architectural Record*, quotes founding NBC President Merlin Aylesworth indicating that the radio network business was so new, that no one could be confident of its profitability when NBC was launched — which militated the economy of a short-term studio lease in the AT&T building. Thus, while NBC inaugurated operations in AT&T’s 1913 building, it must have been almost immediately apparent that new studios were warranted and feasible — and planning began quickly. In January, 1927, NBC leased space for more permanent quarters in an elegant building designed by the Bethlehem Engineering Corporation. Under the lease’s terms the building was to be known as the National Broadcasting Company Building but, in practice, it became known as the Columbia Pictures Building (now known as the Coca-Cola Building). Since the building’s general design was well-underway, NBC had little influence on its basic design. However, NBC’s leased areas included space for eight studios spread over the top 5 floors of the 15 story building. Floors 11 and 12 were used for both offices and artist “green rooms”, with studios com-



mencing on the 13th floor. The NBC areas were designed by noted American architect, Raymond Hood, America's "star" in skyscraper architecture whose work was centered in *art deco*. Surviving floor plans for floors 13, 14 and 15 suggest that each NBC floor was a "double floor" to give studio areas requisite height.

While preparing the Fifth Avenue facilities for NBC, in April, 1927 Hood told the *New York Times* that he was unhappy with the drabness of typical radio studios and that he was, therefore, designing NBC's various studios with multiple personas. His vision included studios which, individually, were stylized as a Gothic church, the Roman forum, a Louis XIV room and, in a space devoted to jazz, something "wildly futuristic, with plenty of color in bizarre designs." His most elaborate studio design was NBC's fabled "Cathedral Studio" – Hood's homage to Gothic church design – which quickly became the Fifth Avenue studio's most prominent programming origination point. On the studios' floor plan, the Cathedral Studio is identified as Studio H (although it never seems to have been referred to that way in practice).

The completed facility, which featured eight broadcasting studios, was of uniformly modernist design and was inaugurated on October 1, 1927. The largest and most sumptuous, the Cathedral Studio, was the setting for NBC's largest programs. Reportedly, NBC adopted its signature chime sound logo at the time it relocated to Fifth Street. While NBC didn't commence regular television broadcasting until 1939, by which time it had departed its Fifth Street location, these studios were nevertheless the location for NBC's first experimental television transmission which occurred on January 16, 1930.

At the time NBC launched, AT&T lacked facilities to provide leased circuits that spanned the country. During NBC's initial months, its programs could be distributed only to stations east of the Mississippi. In order to begin originating radio programs for western stations, NBC needed new studios located in the west. Several months after moving into New York's Fifth Street studios, NBC accordingly leased space in San Francisco on the 22nd and 23rd floors of the stylish Hunter-Dulin Building (located at 111 Sutter Street) which was constructed for the Hunter-Dulin Los Angeles-based investment firm. The New York architectural firm Schulze and Weaver, whose principals had also designed New York's Grand Central Terminal and numerous hotels, including the Waldorf-Astoria and the Sherry Netherlands. NBC additionally leased the building's second and third floors for lobby, reception and executive office spaces. The Hunter-Dulin building was, and remains, a dramatic, elegant architectural statement with styling reminiscent of a French chateau. Its copper mansard roof strikes a bold contrast with neighboring buildings. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the building remains a prominent San Francisco architectural landmark. Yet, once again just had been the case in New York, NBC leased this space in a preexisting structure and had no influence on the building's exterior design. NBC was still evolving its own architectural style.



NBC was clearly beginning to appreciate its growing scope and prominence, a sensibility which was reflected in its evolving use of the name "Radio City" for its regional studio production centers. It's important to note that, while NBC purchased stations in various cities —

such as WTAM, Cleveland and KQV, Pittsburgh — it was the local stations and their associated studio facilities that the network acquired. WRC, in Washington, was a “special case,” in that it was owned by RCA and only managed by NBC, which didn’t purchase the station until 1932. As a result, NBC moved WRC from its pre-NBC home to the National Press Building in 1927, where the network and WRC shared what were originally 20 offices located on the 12th and 13rd floors. Space on the two floors of the National Press Building, designed by George Rapp and Company of Chicago, were modified to create one large 20 foot by 30 foot studio, two stories high, which used 6 of those spaces, with the remainder devoted to two smaller studios and offices. Washington not being seen as an entertainment capitol, the studios were large used for news — which was itself a relatively minor element of radio programming at the time — and NBC seems to have devoted less attention to the Washington installation than to the San Francisco facilities which were essentially contemporaneously established.

Implicitly, NBC seems to have decided to install one regional network production center in each time zone, with the Washington facilities vastly overshadowed by NBC’s New York facilities, and it was these focal points of network operation for which NBC began to evolve the name Radio City.



In most instances, during NBC’s early years NBC installed network regional production centers in buildings which were either quite new or were then under construction. As a result, NBC was able to adapt its own architectural sensibilities to relatively new facilities or directly influence the design of buildings that were then being developed. While the term “Radio City” is generally thought to have first been used in connection with NBC’s 1933 Rockefeller Center complex, a press photo of the newly-opened Merchandise Mart’s Studio A, issued by NBC’s Midwest press relations department, refers to “...the world’s largest radio studio - -one of the six most modern ones in the National Broadcasting Company’s new Midwest radio city in Chicago.” [note lower case]

NBC inaugurated Midwest operations in November, 1927 from studios in a newly completed Chicago skyscraper, the Lake Michigan Building, located at 180 North Michigan Avenue. However, by 1930, radio seemed to be a depression-proof business and increasingly prosperous NBC needed to create regional production centers which reflected the company’s grand vision of its future. With the network’s cramped New York studios limiting programming originations, NBC set about developing larger quarters in Chicago to expand its programming capabilities and moved into Chicago’s vast, newly-constructed, Merchandise Mart, on October 10, 1930.

The Merchandise Mart, whose architect was Alfred Shaw, was designed in a general *art deco* style and, again, NBC was in the position of leasing space in a building which had been designed for more general uses. In moving to the Merchandise Mart, NBC President, Merlin H. Aylesworth, announced that “Three years ago, I said that Chicago would be the radio center of the United States. Today, from the National Broadcasting Company facility and studio standpoint, that prediction has come true. In a few months, more programs will originate here than in New York.”

NBC's Merchandise Mart spaces were designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, and NBC's 65,000 square feet occupied the building's 19th and 20th floors with the latter reserved for visitors' galleries where the public could observe NBC's production studios (which were located on the 19th floor along with network administrative offices). NBC's own art director, Gerard Chatfield, designed the NBC interiors, which were produced by Marshall Field and Company and, at the time the Chicago facilities were opened, they boasted the largest radio studio in the world. In 1935, NBC leased an addition 11,500 square feet (in the previously unutilized building "tower" for studios F, G and H). In 1944, the Blue Network leased an additional 3,700 square feet on the 18th floor as a result of the realignments pending in connection with that network's separation from the NBC Red network. While NBC's uses for the Merchandise Mart studios evolved over the years, radio properties remained active in the Merchandise Mart until 1989 when they moved to the newly-constructed NBC Chicago tower. NBC-TV continues to operate studios on the 19th and 20th floors of the building.

RCA's visionary president, David Sarnoff, predicted a huge future for broadcasting and was already operating the country's major broadcasting enterprise. When the Metropolitan Opera's plans to construct a new opera house in John D. Rockefeller's Manhattan Rockefeller Center project collapsed, Sarnoff took over the Met's portion of that project and had a huge broadcasting complex designed to reflect the grand destiny he foresaw for NBC. One of his terms with Rockefeller was that NBC could name that portion of Rockefeller Center it would occupy. Sarnoff promptly renamed "it Radio City," a name with sufficient power that came to define the entire Rockefeller Center complex.

Rockefeller Center was, and remains, one of architecture's *art deco* gems. Now generally regarded as one of the twentieth century's most important and successful buildings, its design was initially broadly lambasted. The *New York Herald Tribune* found it an "affair of bald cubes assembled in expressionless order." Frank Lloyd Wright termed it "the last atrocity committed upon a people already about to revolt." Another architect, Lewis Mumford who designed the Chrysler Building, bellowed "If Radio City is the best our architects can do with freedom, they deserve to remain in chains."

But Radio City had been designed for its owner, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., by a contingent of architects loosely assembled under the rubric Associated Architects, who boldly stepped forward to design the largest development ever planned to that time. The architectural group's principals consisted of Raymond Hood, who had earlier designed the NBC spaces in 711 Fifth Street, and W.K. Harrison. Hood was an unconventional architect with a huge flair for design and disdain for convention. In describing skyscraper design, Hood once observed "For the client, [building a skyscraper] is a chance to a return on his money, for the manufacturer a chance to sell his product, for the contractor a chance to make a profit. There remains the architect, the building's only friend." Radio City's inaugural broadcast occurred on NBC's seventh anniversary, November 15, 1933. The network's 22-studio Radio City facility embodied a fusion of the stylish, new *art moderne* design, the latest construction technology, and specially commissioned art work which expressed the nation's high expectations for social, educational and artistic attainment which radio seemed to offer. Relief sculptures like "Wisdom" (over the RCA building main entrance), and the inside murals of Juan Sert, depicted the story of a com-

munications revolution in the making. To a far greater than typical degree, the completed Radio City New York became an iconic advertising image for both NBC specifically, and the radio/communications industry generally.

Sarnoff, whose electronic media career began as a telegrapher for American Marconi when he was just a youth, was in London at the time Radio City New York was inaugurated. Harkening back to his telegrapher days, he used a telegraph key to flash the letters “R C A” to New York to signal the building’s formal inauguration while narrating the ceremony on a transoceanic circuit. The building was renamed the GE Building in 1986 when that company purchased RCA (although it is still referred to as the RCA building in this publication.) With NBC’s 2013 sale to Comcast, it now seems likely to be renamed the Comcast Building.

Next, NBC designed new quarters for station KOA, Denver Co, which the network purchased in March, 1930. Opened on the Tenth Anniversary of KOA’s first broadcast, December 15, 1934, the new studio complex—called Denver Radio City—occupied the fourth, fifth and sixth floors of a building at 1625 California Street. Walter H. Simon was the architect. While NBC sold KOA in 1952 to a company owned by Bob Hope, KOA (joined by its TV counterpart) occupied Radio City until August, 1959. The building was demolished in the early 1960’s.

Following Denver Radio City, NBC began designing a huge broadcasting complex for the corner of Sunset and Vine Streets in Hollywood. It was a historic location, the site of Hollywood’s first motion picture studio. Industrialists had originally believed that San Francisco would be the West Coast equivalent of New York City but, by the mid-1930’s, it had become clear that Los Angeles would surpass its northerly rival in prominence.

NBC decided to construct a new western facility, known as Radio City Hollywood, on a scale commensurate with Radio City New York to augment its original western network outpost in San Francisco. While NBC was certainly not the first to utilize *streamline moderne* styling for a radio broadcasting property, the Hollywood project provided NBC with its first opportunity to design a complex “from the ground up” and the resulting structure became one of the nation’s most elegant, and prominent, applications of that style in radio.

Designed by John C. Austin (who also designed the Griffith Park Observatory, the Los Angeles City Hall and other major area buildings), the massive, pale green and creamed *streamline moderne* Radio City Hollywood was, in many respects, NBC’s crowning architectural achievement. Constructed at a cost of \$2,000,000 (the equivalent of \$32.2 million in 2012), NBC designed Radio City Hollywood with stunning attention to detail including entirely floating studios in which each studio was actually a separate building standing on its own, separate foundation), construction which used no rivets (to avoid any motion in wall surfaces) and corridors adjacent to studios featuring cork flooring to reduce sound noise. Studios were constructed with no two walls being parallel and each of the four audience studios featured a slightly different color scheme. Radio City Hollywood’s impressive lobby stood three stories tall, featured a terrazzo floor in which lightning bolts pointed to the building’s Master Control, which was situated behind what NBC termed “invisible glass” to facilitate public viewing. “Invisible glass” reportedly was achieved by constructing the window in such a way “that the surfaces of the glass are curved to a continuously different radius from front to back so that reflections are directed

away from the observer to an absorbing surface” providing a view unobstructed by reflections. Featuring four large audience studios — each of which seated 340 persons — and four studios without audience spaces, the lobby’s crowning achievement was a huge 20 foot by 40 foot mural. “The Spirit of Radio,” designed by Edward Trumble, spanned the lobby’s eastern and southern walls above the visible Master Control’s location over which the mural was centered. Radio City Hollywood opened on October 17, 1938 but lasted barely a quarter of a century before, in recognition of the vast decline in network radio programming operations, it was demolished in 1964 to make way for a bank.



The *streamline moderne* was well-suited to NBC’s self-concept and the vision of its by-then president, David Sarnoff. Where CBS displayed a strong artistic flair, in the *art deco* style, NBC fully embraced the industrial, transportation-evolved *streamline moderne* style. The two networks’ differing self-concepts are quite clearly illustrated in two commemorative medals which each network produced. CBS’s medal, which was created in 1931 to honor individuals who had made “distinguished contribution to the radio art,” was designed by noted American sculptor Gaetano Cecere and featured a flamboyant, flowing *art deco* design. Almost in direct reactions, in 1936 NBC struck a medallion to commemorate the network’s 10th anniversary. Strongly *machine age* in design, the NBC medallion was made of pewter where the CBS medal was cast in bronze. The NBC medal must have been conceived in 1935 or early 1936, and would have thus been a precursor to the looming serious design work for Radio City Hollywood. NBC’s evolution from *industrial modern* to *streamline moderne* thus came quickly, and from a distinctly different vision, than that of the network’s principal rival, CBS.



[left] CBS medal, 1931.
[above] NBC medal, 1936.

In San Francisco, NBC began operating from the 22nd floor of the Hunter-Dolin building, at 111 Sutter Street, which by the late 1930’s seemed inadequate. Not yet fully appreciating the degree to which network radio production would migrate to Hollywood, NBC began planning for a new San Francisco facility immediately upon completion of Radio City Hollywood. Radio City San Francisco was designed by Albert F. Roller, again in *streamline moderne* style, and opened in 1942. Legend has it that, belatedly understanding Hollywood’s rise in prominence, NBC tried at the last minute to cancel construction of the San Francisco facility but the cancellation order arrived slightly too late to be implemented. In some eyes, that made the building a “white elephant” from the day its doors opened. At Radio City San Francisco, NBC continued its investment in art representing the importance of radio with a main façade fired tile mural, designed by C. J. Fitzgerald, which remains a San Francisco artistic and architectural landmark. NBC abandoned Radio City San Francisco when its 25-year lease expired in 1967. However, the building returned to broadcast usage when Field Communications’ KBHK-TV, Channel 44, took over much of the former NBC space in the late 1970’s. Field lovingly uncovered and restored the Fitzgerald façade mural, which had gone unseen ever since



RCA 88A studio microphone, late 1930s.



RCA even carried its streamline moderne styling to its line of transmitters, as is evident in this RCA high-power shortwave transmitter circa 1940.

the days of NBC's tenancy.

NBC's last an opportunity to design a facility it was following the radio operation's departure from the Merchandise Mart which occasioned the construction of the NBC Tower in 1989. The Leeds Silver 37-story NBC Tower was constructed at 455 N. Cityfront Plaza and, interestingly, the building – albeit over fifty years since the network's last architectural commission -- was again designed utilizing the *streamline moderne* style which had become NBC's architectural signature.

NBC's *streamline moderne* studios in Hollywood and San Francisco dramatically reinforced communications architecture across the nation. A significant percentage of local radio station studios designed immediately before and following World War II very consciously emulated the NBC designs. RCA's own manufacturing division, which was a major supplier of radio (and early television) studio and transmission equipment carried the *streamline moderne* styling into the equipment, which was heavily used in local station's studio interiors across America.

In architecture, broadcasting science and artistic content, NBC created facilities which made bold statements about the company's vision of broadcasting and its future. Spanning the nation, these buildings express a sense of mission and place unequalled in American communications architecture.

In 2013, only Radio City New York, and the 1989 Chicago facility, remain in operation as a broadcast facilities (although, notwithstanding its name, Radio City ceased to be home to any NBC radio enterprise with the sale of WNBC-AM on October 8, 1988 and the sale of the NBC Network, and that name, to General Electric in 1989). Radio City Hollywood and Radio City Denver were demolished long ago and Radio City San Francisco now boasts only its exterior fired-tile mural as homage to the building's broadcast past. Yet, the style, form, content and art embodied in these buildings all strikingly continue to transmit the passion, vision and sense of innovation which gave them birth.

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New York

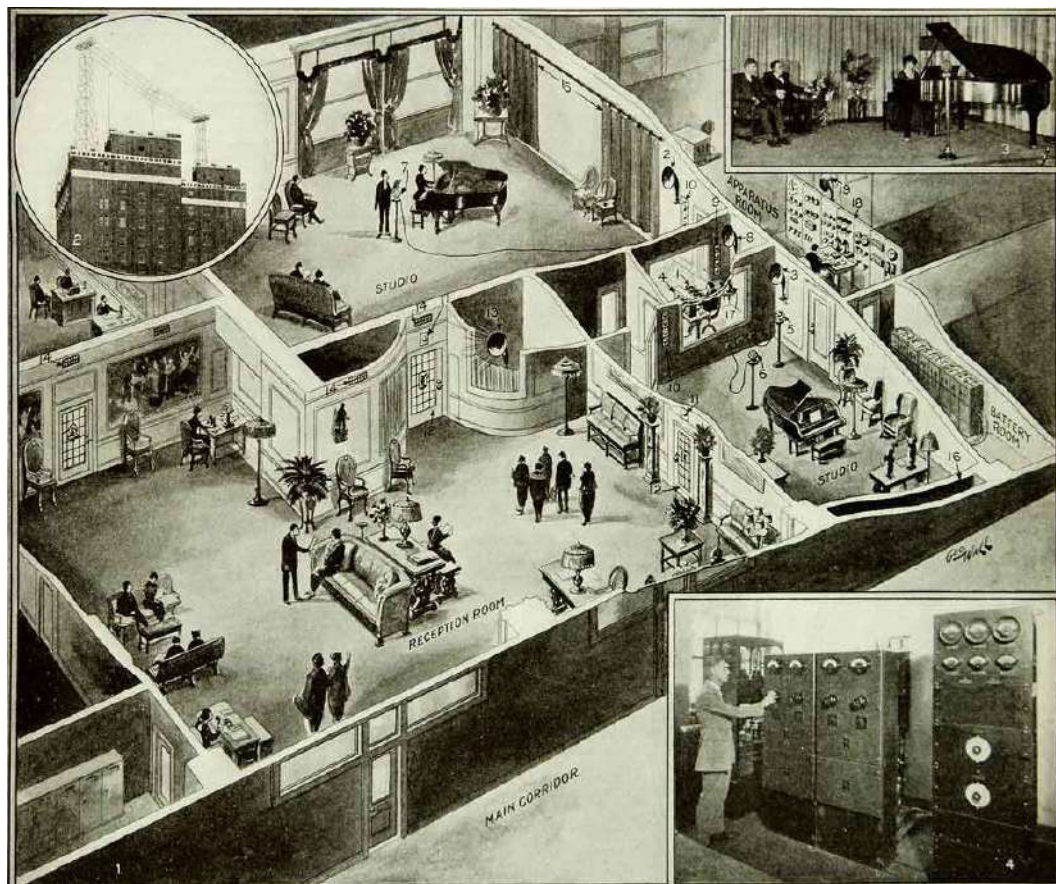
195 Broadway





NBC occupied the AT&T headquarters building for only 11 months so it can be assumed that the network largely inherited the WEA/AT&T studio facilities as they had existed prior to NBC's launch. Both the photo at left, and the floor plan, date from the pre-NBC ownership era but are likely reasonably accurate reflections of NBC's brief tenancy prior to the network's move to 711 Fifth Avenue.

[Above] Main studio during broadcast [postcard, Ronald Kramer collection]
 [Below] Floor plan of WEA studios, 1924. [Scientific American, May, 1924]



New York

711 Fifth Avenue



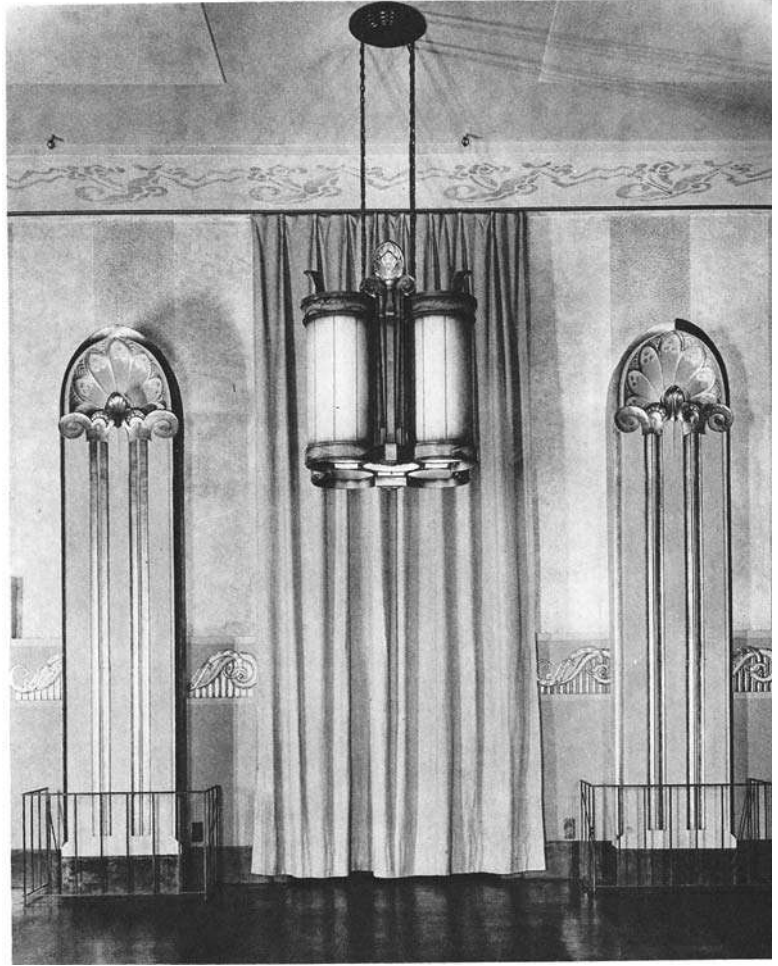


(Above) Studio H—Cathedral Studio [Architectural Record, July 1928]

*(Left) Cathedral Studio
chandelier and pedestal detail*

(Below) Conference room

*[Architectural Record, July
1928]*





Corridor with elevators

*[Architectural Record
July 1928]*

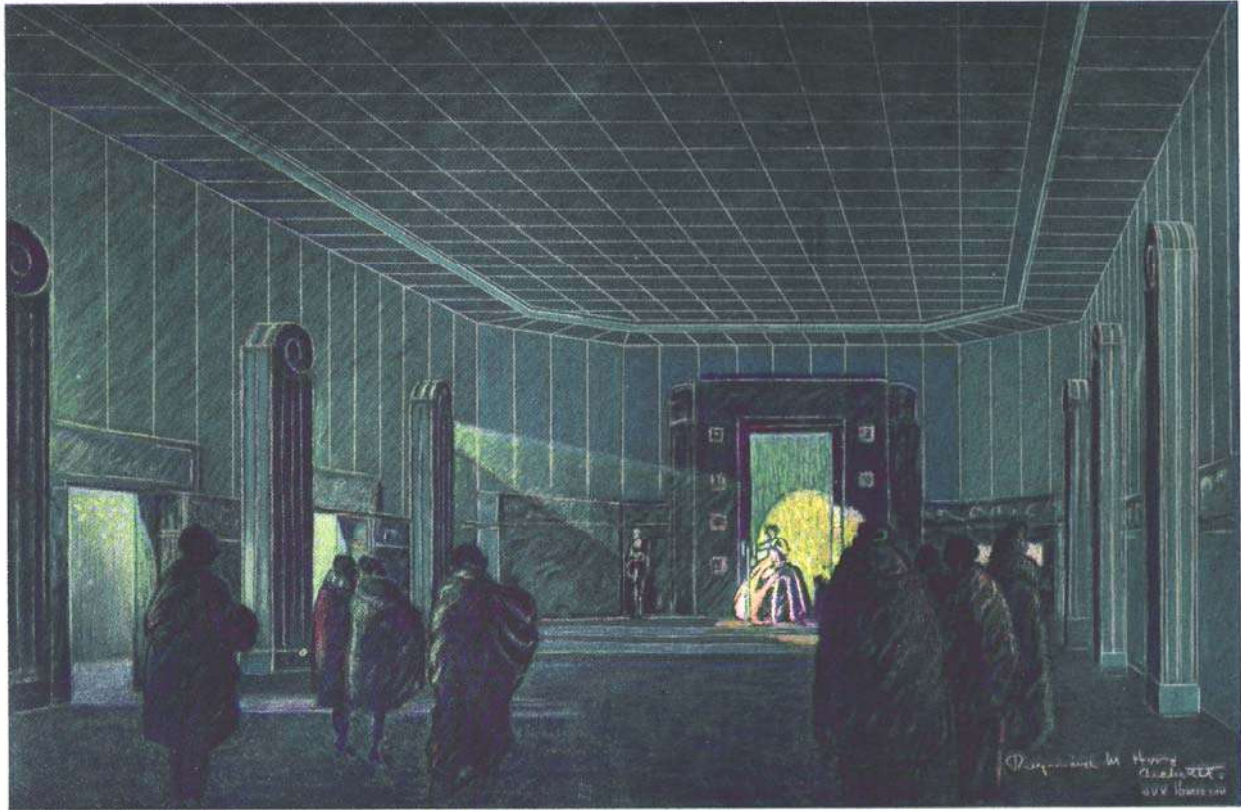


Elevator detail close-up

*[Architectural Record , July
1928]*



Another studio [Architectural Record July 1928]



(Above) Cathedral Studio during a performance; (Below left) Sitting area; (Below right) Lounge
[Architectural Record, July 1928]

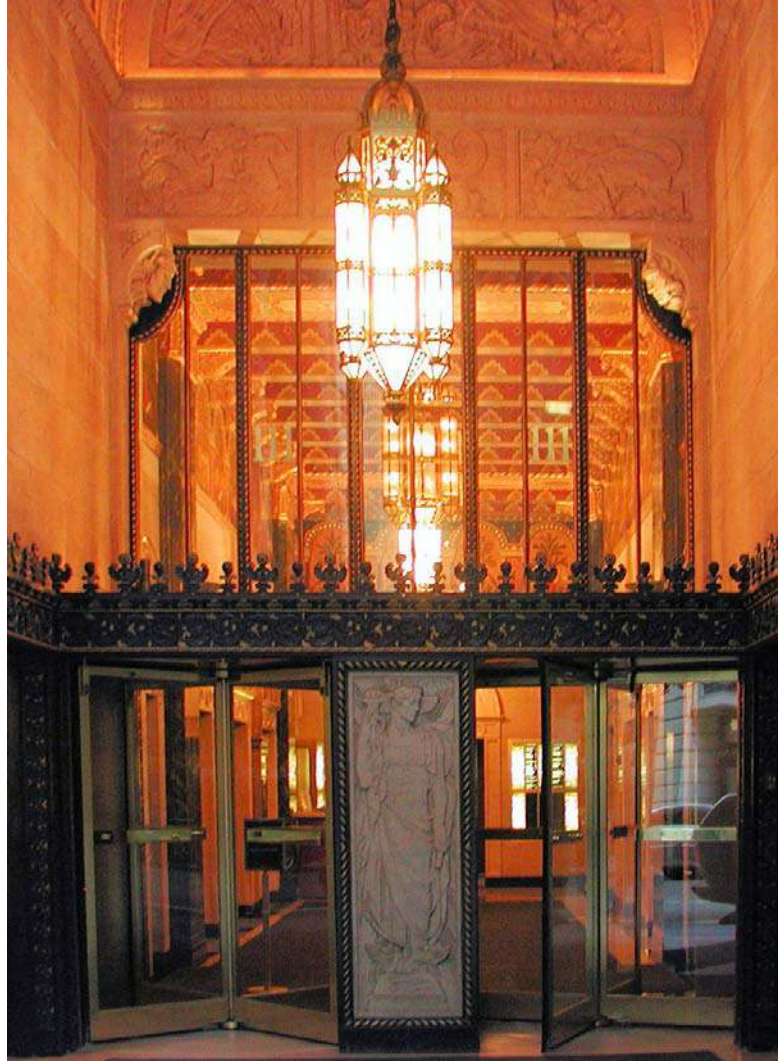


San Francisco

111 Sutter Street



*Hunter-Dulin Building
[postcard, Ronald Kramer collection]*



A National Landmark, 111 Sutter Street retains its distinctive Romanesque character.

(Above Left) Building main entry decorative panel

(Above Right) Main entrance

(Right) Main Entrance column

[photos by Ronald Kramer]





(Above) Main entry [Courtesy of Anomalous_A]



(Left) Entry ceiling close-up [Photo by Ronald Kramer]



(Left) Lobby [Courtesy of SF Uncovered]

(Below Left) Lobby tile

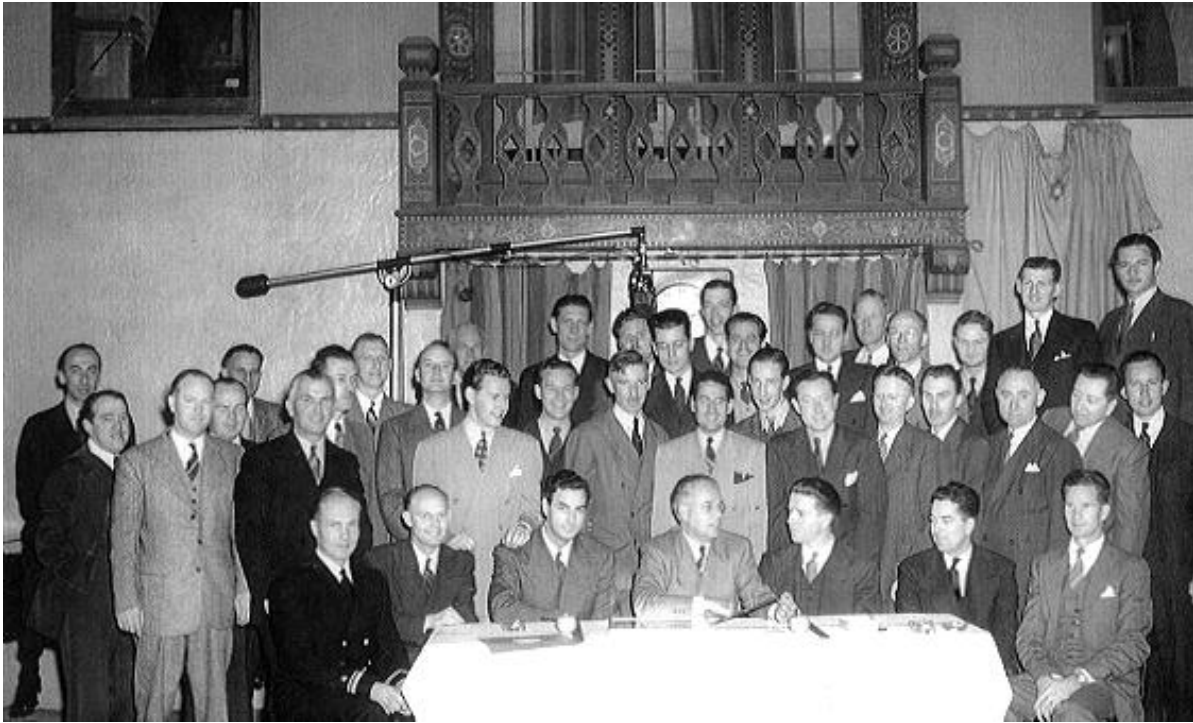
(Below Right) Exterior entry arch

(Bottom Left) Elevator detail

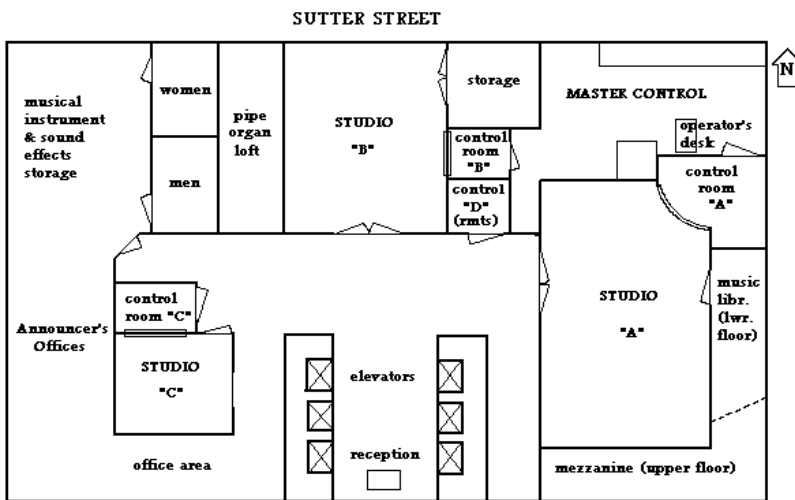
(Bottom Right) Lobby ceiling detail

[Courtesy of Traveling with Sweeney]





Announcers, engineers and other staff of the NBC San Francisco operations in Studio A in 1941. The occasion was the last day as an announcer of Bill Wood, preparing to enter active service as Lt. j. g. Bill Wood. There are several men from NBC New York in the photo, perhaps because of the then-current construction of the NBC Radio City building.



(Left) Floor plan of Sutter street studios



(Above) Second floor lobby/reception area

(Below) Main transmission room through which all network feeds were controlled
[Courtesy of John Schneider]





The Sutter Street studio's predominant Spanish Mission design is apparent in this 21st floor view of the entry to Studio A (to the left) and the staircase to the 22nd floor viewing area which "flew" above the studio floor. [Courtesy of John Schneider]



(Above) The popular program 'One Man's Family' is being broadcast from Studio C, in 1934. The program was heard on the NBC Pacific Coast Network. Shown are (left to right:) Kathleen Wilson (Claudia); Barton Yarbrough (Clifford); Bill Andrews (announcer); sound effects man Ed Ludes and his water effects machine; Bernice Berwin (Hazel); Mike Raffetto (Paul Barbour); Minetta Ellen (Mother Barbour); Page Gilman (Jack); J. Anthony Smythe (Father Barbour).

(Right) Max Dolin conducting NBC Orchestra in Studio A, 1929. [Ronald Kramer collection]





*(Above) Another view of a broadcast of 'One Man's Family'. in Studio 'A' sometime in the mid 1930's.
(Below) Max Dolin conducts NBC Firestone Group in Studio A., 1929..*



Washington, D.C.

National Press Building



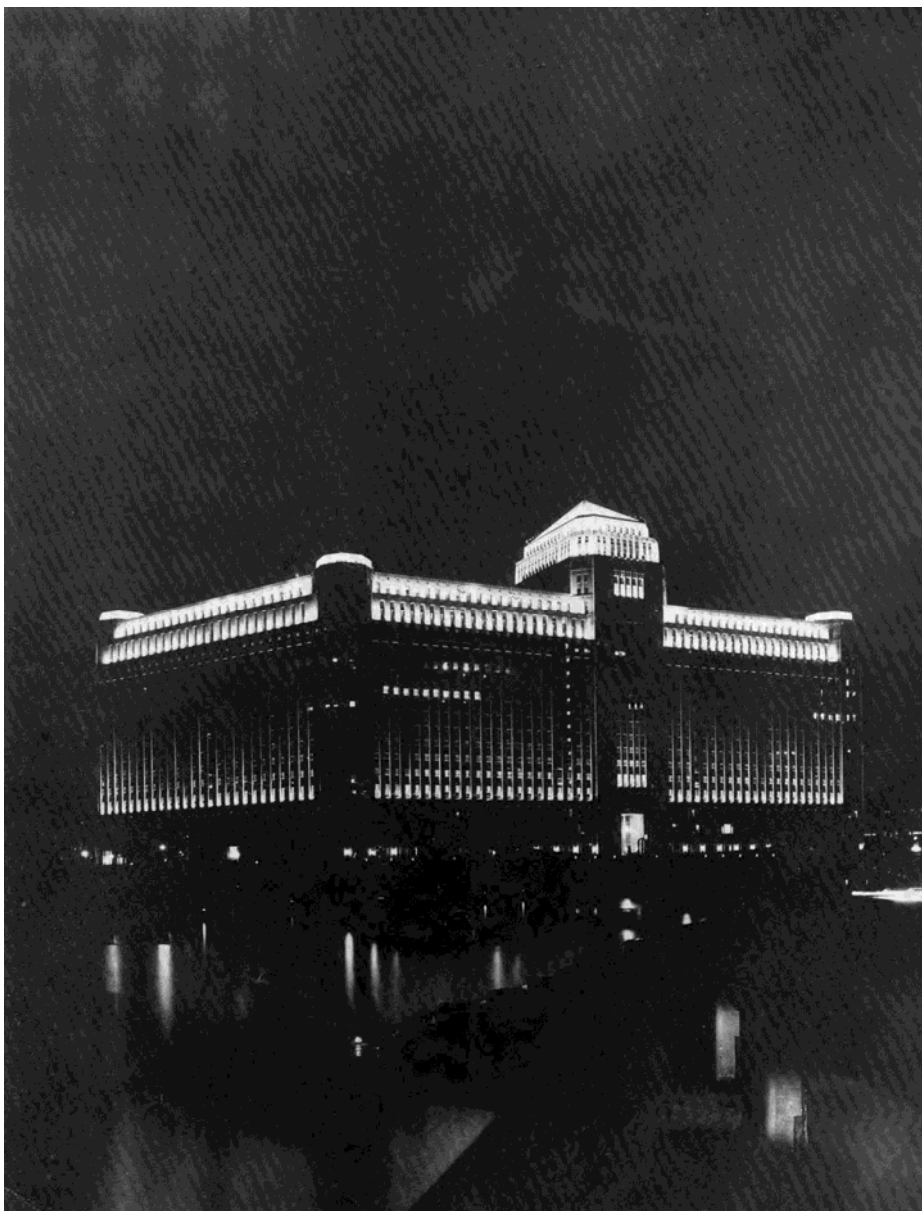
*National Press Building, 1930
[postcard, Ronald Kramer collection]*



*NBC opens new Washington studios, 1928.
[Courtesy, Library of Congress]*

Chicago

Merchandise Mart



Merchandise Mart at night [postcard, Ronald Kramer collection]



(Above) Studio A (original) was the largest, and most elegant, radio studio in the nation until that distinction was taken by Studio 8H at NBC's Rockefeller Center studios in 1933. (Below) Household Finance Orchestra performing on Blue Network from Studio A, c. 1930. [Ronald Kramer collection]

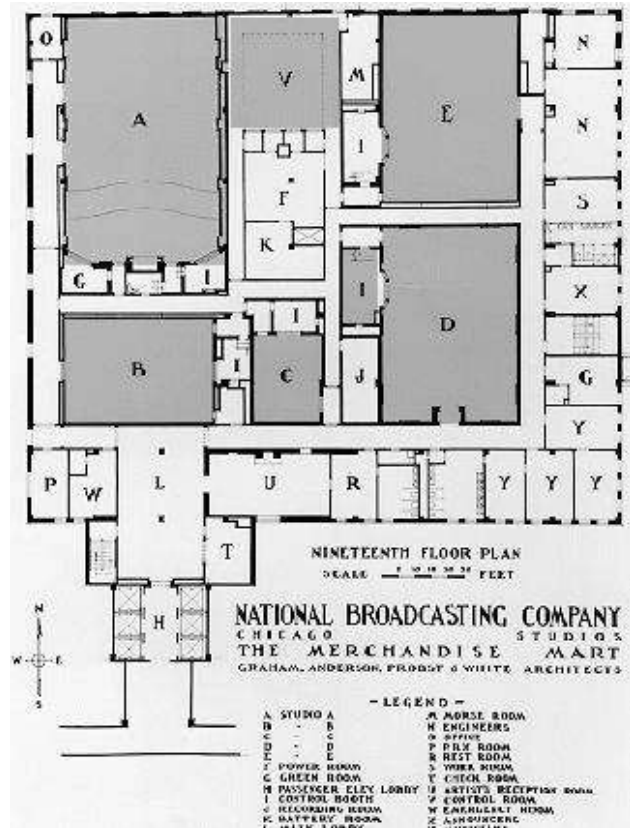




Studio A (remodeled) [Courtesy Rich Samuels]

(Right) NBC Merchandise Mart studios 19th floor (comprising 65,000 sq. ft) plan showing all of the original studios (with the exception of the original Studio F which was located on the 20th floor. Which, beginning in 1935, also housed an organ chamber and two echo rooms). Not shown are three studios built in 1935 (the "new" Studio F, Studio G and Studio H) in an area of the 19th floor not shown on this plan; and three additional studios (Studio T, Studio U and Studio V) built in the southeast corner of the 19th floor several years later.

[Courtesy of Rich Samuels]





(Left) Studio B

[Courtesy Rich Samuels]

*(Below) Merchandise Mart
NBC Master Control*

[Ronald Kramer collection]



[Above left] Merchandise Mart NBC Master Control showing full wall of patch panels at left.

[Above right] Master Control showing a wider view. [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]

(Below) Merchandise Mart NBC Master Control [Ronald Kramer collection]



(Left) Studio C (original) The black panel next to the door on the rear wall was likely the “announcers delight” — a switching control panel that allowed announcers to route the studio’s signal to the appropriate leg(s) of the NBC network(s).

(Below) Studio C (remodeled)

[Courtesy Rich Samuels]





*[Above] Studio D [original]
[Below] Studio D [remodeled] [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]*





*[Above] Studio D after remodeling
[Below] Studio E [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]*





Studio E (remodeled) [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]

[Right] Glen Webster at the Studio E control room mixing console. Each control room had an identical 4-fader console which, as radio evolved, became inadequate for more complex productions. In the 1940s, they were replaced with larger, more flexible units. [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]





Studio F, which was quite unlike the other Chicago studios, was reportedly built especially for the Amos 'n Andy program and was designed to provide the feeling of an elegant, contemporary parlor with its use of rich woods walls.

[Above] Studio F [Ronald Kramer collection]

[Bottom] Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll (Amos 'n Andy) in Studio F looking into the control room in the mid-1930s. [Courtesy of Rich Samuels]



*[Right] Studio G
[Below] Studio H
[Courtesy Rich Samuels*



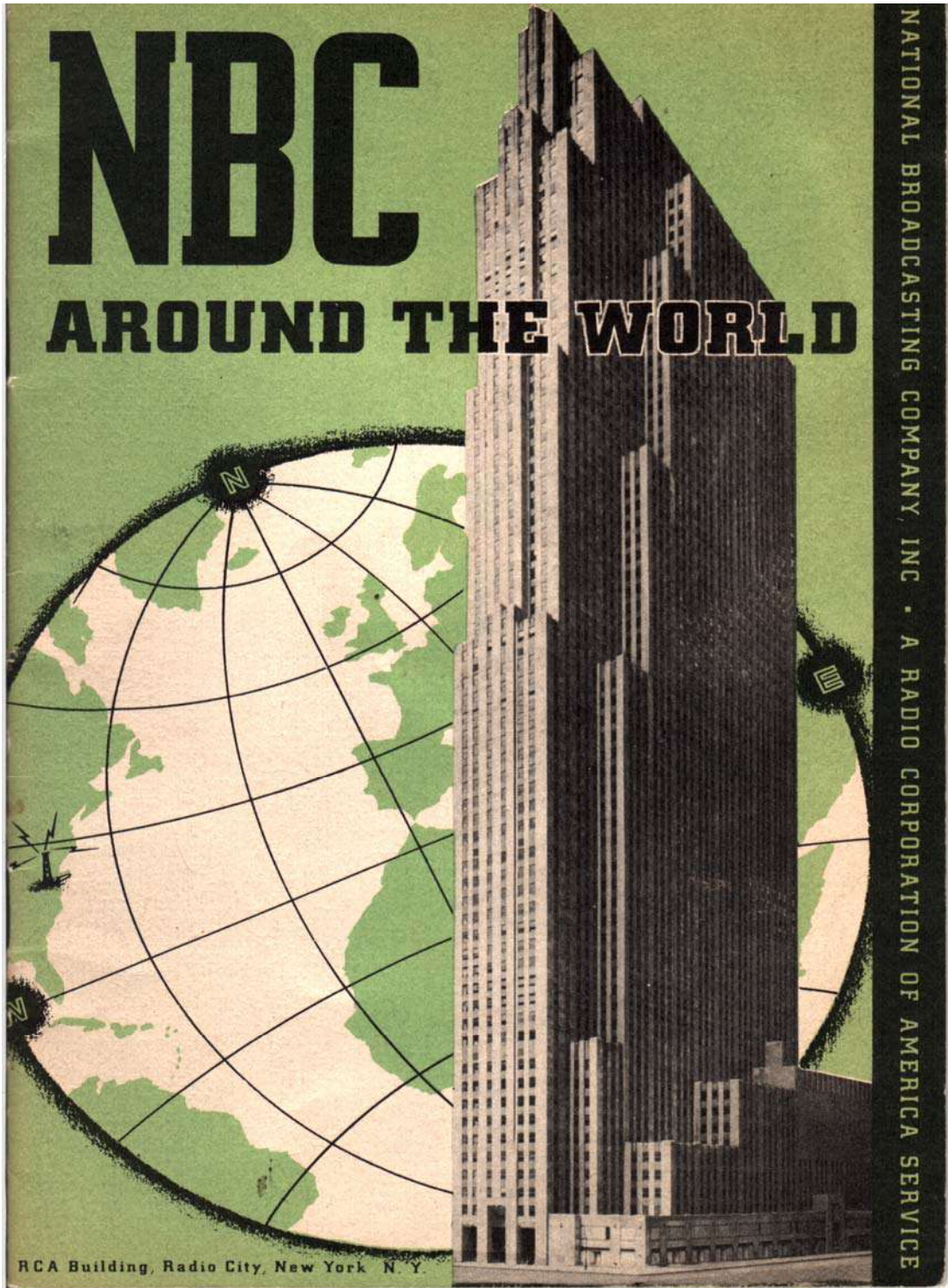
New York

Radio City Rockefeller Center



*View of Rockefeller Center at
night, 1933*

[Courtesy of Wikipedia.org]



*NBC Radio City tour brochure
[Ronald Kramer collection]*



RCA Building, North Entrance, deep-relief sculptures by noted art deco artist Leo Friedlander, symbolic of radio.

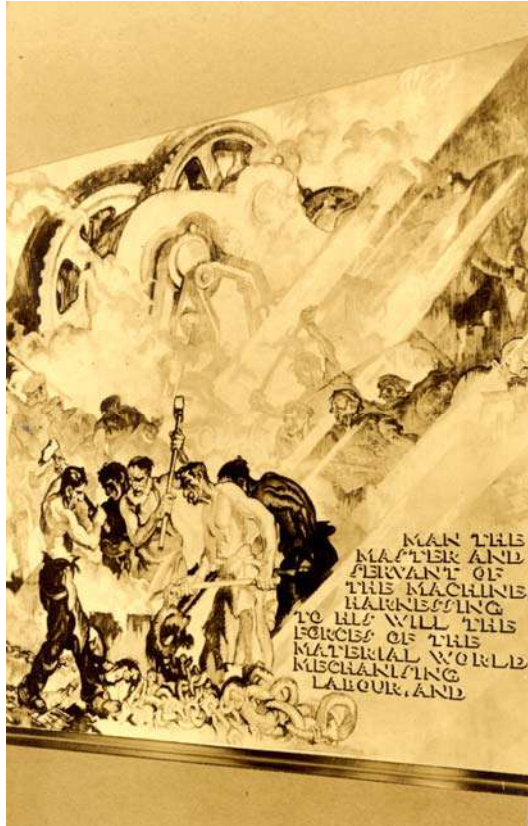


[Left] RCA Building Main Lobby south wall ceiling monochrome mural, by Jose Maria Sert, showing titanic figures of the Past, Present and Future against a spiral of planes in flight.

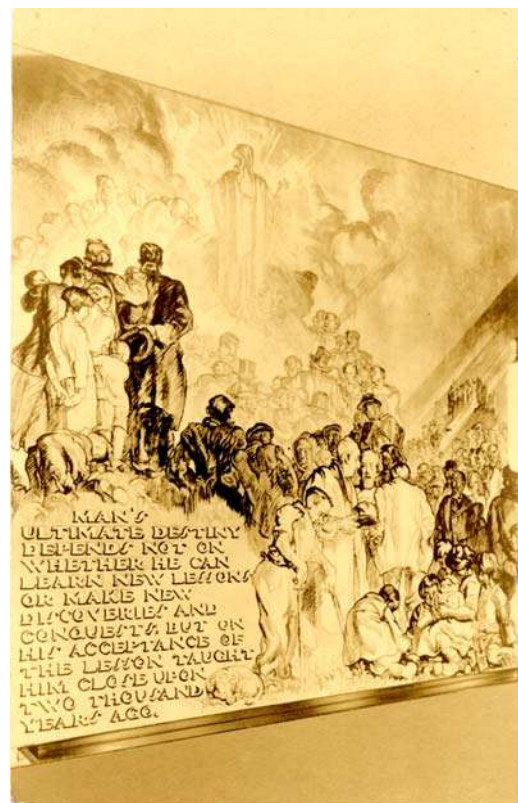
[Below] RCA Building, West Entrance at 1250 Avenue of the Americas, exterior mural by Barry Faulkner Intelligence Awakening," mosaic frieze. [RCAT fig 287]

According to Raymond Hood biographer, Walter H. Kilham, Hood entered the lobby of the RCA Building during construction and concluded that the vast space was too barren. When his proposal for including a large statue was rejected because of its predicted weight load, Hood recommended the creation of large murals which led to commissions from the noted Communist painter, Diego Rivera, Jose Maria Sert and Frank Brangwin. Rivera was reportedly insulted by the others' presence, whom he considered inferior. His 1100 foot mural, "Man at the Crossroads," became controversial and, when he refused to remove a likeness of Lenin's head from his work, the mural was ordered to be replaced with another Sert work which included Abraham Lincoln. The destruction of Rivera's mural is considered to be one of the most controversial events in twentieth century art history.



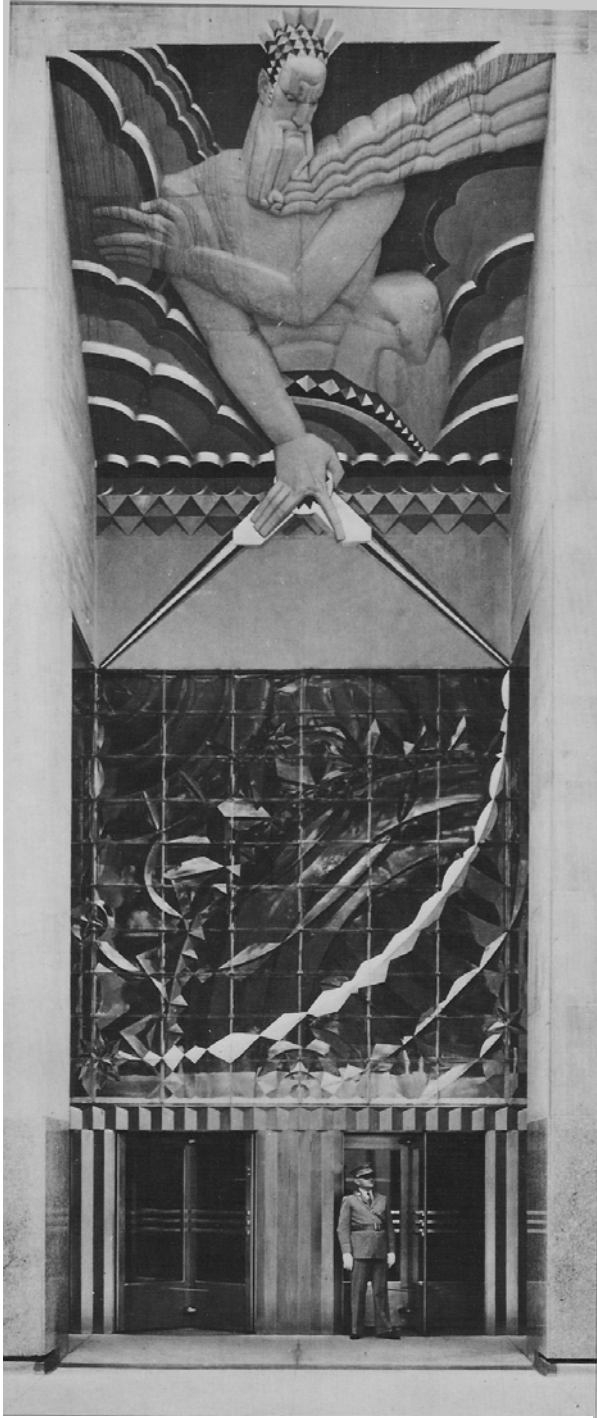


RCA Building north lobby elevator bank wall, four-panel mural — Main the Creator, Man Laboring, Man the Master and Sermon on the Mount — by Frank Brangwyn [Ronald Kramer collection]





Jose Maria Sert's "American Progress" occupies the space — which originally was to have been filled with Diego Rivera's "Man at the Crossroads" — behind the RCA Building's main lobby reception desk, [Courtesy of Diane Bondareff]



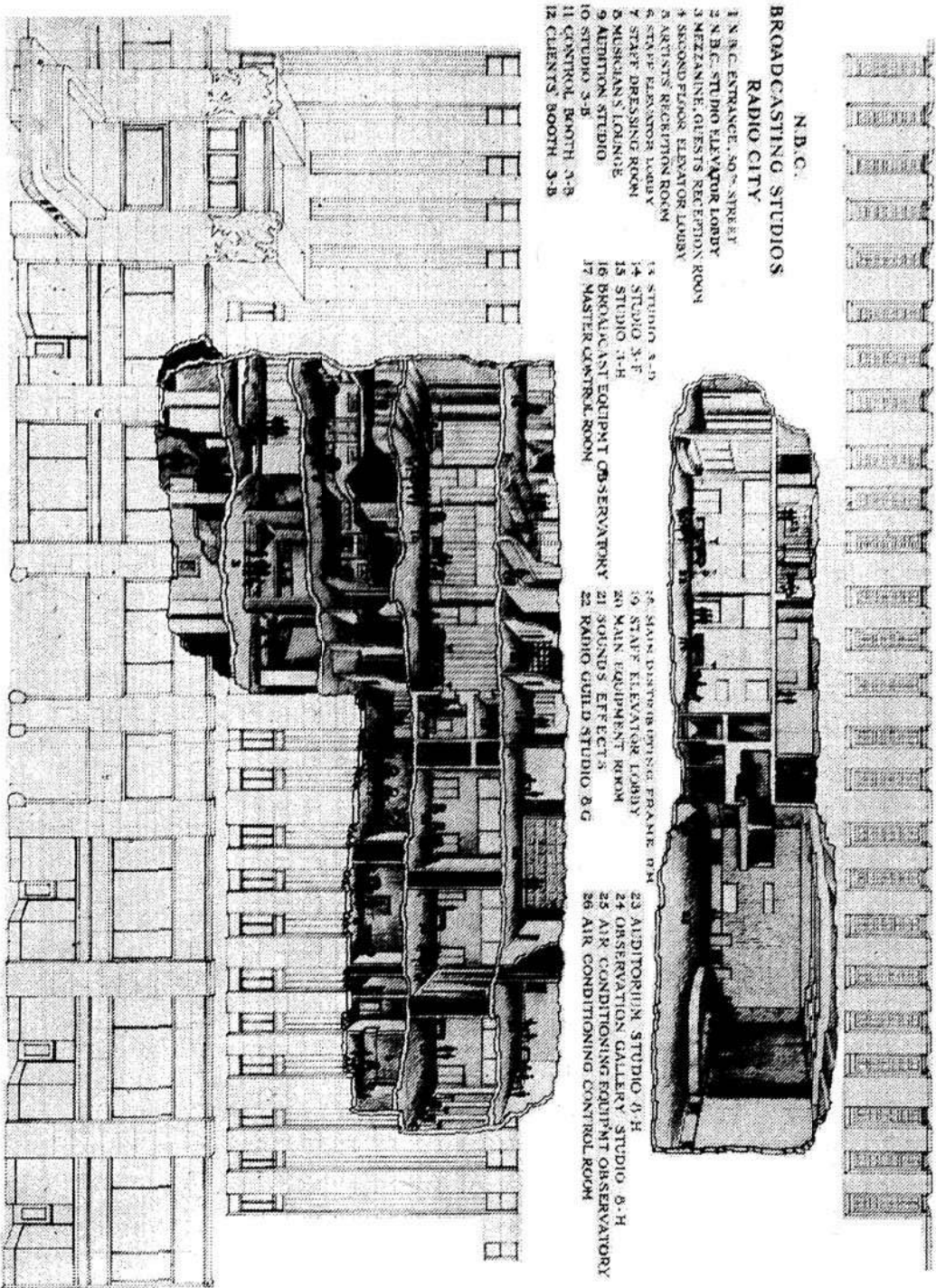
(Above) RCA Building Main entrance, Lee Lawrie sculpture "Wisdom: A Voice from the Clouds" (more popularly known as "Wisdom"). [RCAT interior cover page and fig 273] "The central figure represents genius, which interprets to the human race the laws and cycles of the cosmic forces of the Universe and thus rules over all man's activities. The compass marks on the glass screen below reflect the cycles of Light and Sound."

Lee Lawrie was the artist who created the greatest number of works for the Rockefeller Center complex. Besides the "Wisdom" entry panel, he also created the Prometheus statute outside the main RCA Building entrance as well as prominent pieces for the International Building.

According to Rockefeller Center biographer, Daniel Okrent, Lawrie adapted "Wisdom" from the frontispiece drawing for a 1790s William Blake work.

The Rockefeller family's offices were located in the RCA Building and reportedly John D. Rockefeller, Jr. — who committed the family fortune to Rockefeller Center's creation — paid special attention to "Wisdom" because it was the only entrance to the building he was willing to use (arising from the fact that he disliked the Friedlander sculptures adorning the building's north and south entrances).

Floor Plan of NBC Radio City Rockefeller Center
[Broadcasting Magazine, November 15, 1933]



N.B.C.
 BROADCASTING STUDIOS
 RADIO CITY

- 1 N.B.C. ENTRANCE, 50th STREET
- 2 N.B.C. STUDIO ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 3 MEZZANINE, GUESTS' RECEPTION ROOM
- 4 SECOND FLOOR ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 5 ARTISTS' RECEPTION ROOM
- 6 STAFF ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 7 STAFF DRESSING ROOM
- 8 MUSICIAN'S LOUNGE
- 9 AUDITION STUDIO
- 10 STUDIO 3-B
- 11 CONTROL ROOM 3-A-B
- 12 CLIENTS' BOOTH 3-B

- 13 STUDIO 3-D
- 14 STUDIO 3-E
- 15 STUDIO 3-H
- 16 BROADCASTING EQUIPMENT OBSERVATORY
- 17 MASTER CONTROL ROOM

- 18 MAIN DISTRIBUTION FRAME RM
- 19 STAFF ELEVATOR LOBBY
- 20 MAIN EQUIPMENT ROOM
- 21 SOUNDS' EFFECTS
- 22 RADIO GUILD STUDIO 3-G

- 23 AUDITORIUM STUDIO 3-H
- 24 OBSERVATION GALLERY STUDIO 3-H
- 25 AIR CONDITIONING EQUIPMENT OBSERVATORY
- 26 AIR CONDITIONING CONTROL ROOM



*(Above) Main
entrance foyer
[Courtesy NBC fr
New York Radio]*



*(Above) Main
reception area
[Blast from the
Past, p 246]*

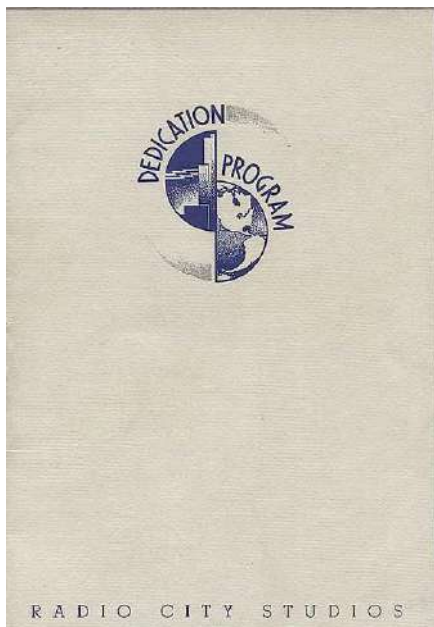
*(Right) Lobby
[Margaret Bourke
White photo,
Library of
Congress
cph.3a49993]*





*Two lobby views
 (Above) [Courtesy of New York Public Library
 1558105]; (Below right) [Courtesy of Library of
 Congress]*

*(Below left) Radio City New York 1933 dedication
 program [Ronald Kramer collection]*





(Above) Second floor lobby [Ronald Kramer collection]

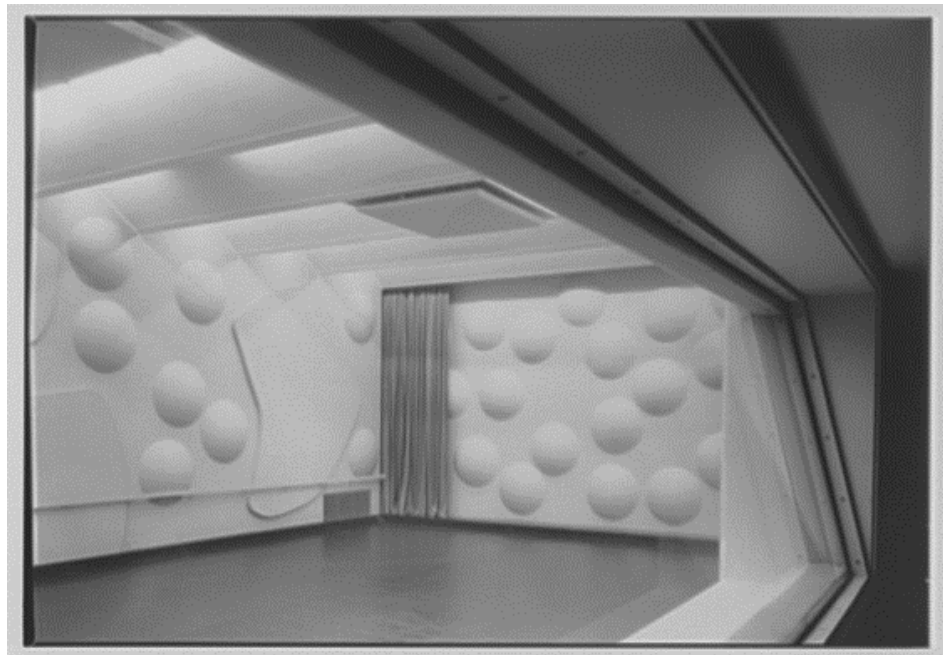


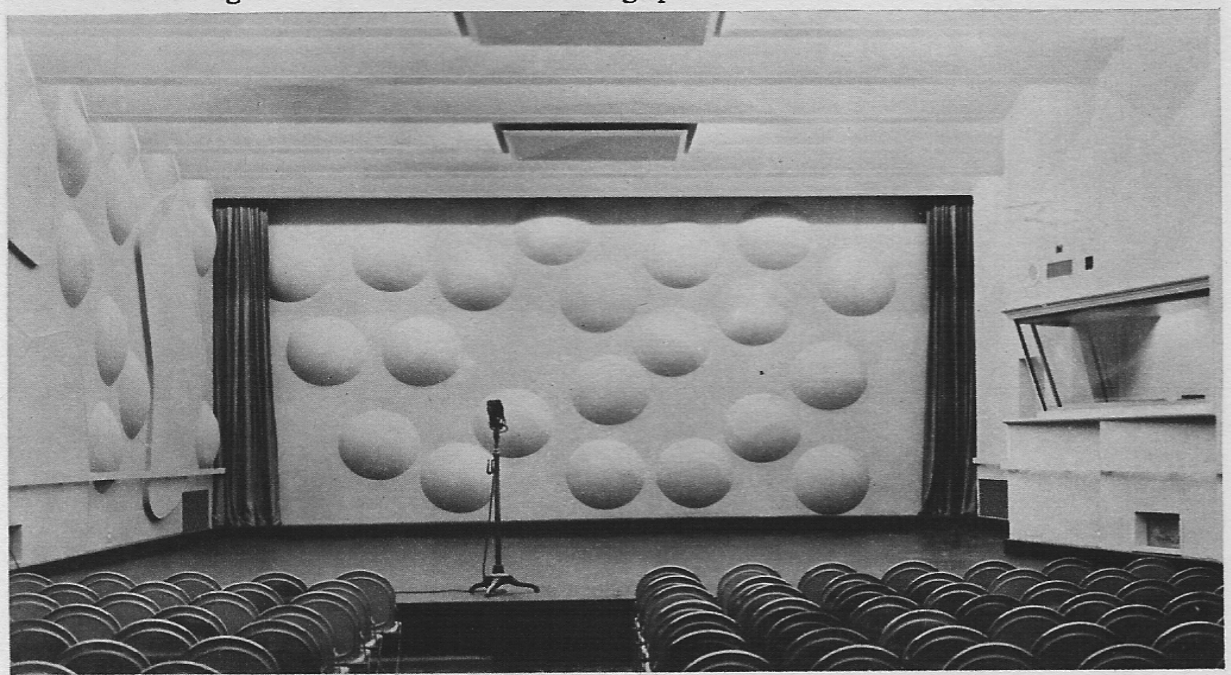
*(Above) Studio 3A, following its 1948 television conversion, looking toward stage.
(Below) Studio 3A side wall showing acoustic tuning panels.
[RCA AM-FM Broadcasting magazine, September, 1948]*





*[Above] Sixth Floor studio
[Below] View into studio from control room [Courtesy of Library of Congress]*





Small studio



(Left) Studio 6A back wall



(Left) Studio 8H (originally just called Studio H, which is located on Radio City's eighth floor), originally held an audience of 1250. [Courtesy of Hagley Museum and Library OCLC 488708123]



(Right) Eighth floor lobby outside studio 8H (the studio doors are in the distance in the center (Ronald Kramer collection))



(Above) Radio Guild Studio (also known as 8G). Note the glass “curtain” which separates the audience from the cast on stage. Studio 8G was converted for television in 1948, the first TV studio conversion which NBC made. 8G was selected for that purpose because its two-story height made it ideal for the addition of the necessary TV lighting grid. 8G’s “flying control room,” above the studio floor, also allowed the director to be located above the studio for the best sight lines on floor action. [Ronald Kramer collection]



(Left) Smaller studio, seating 250, 1936. [Ronald Kramer collection]



(Above) Studio 8E [Courtesy NBC for New York Radio]

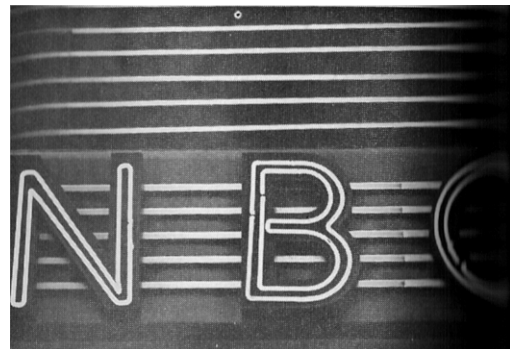


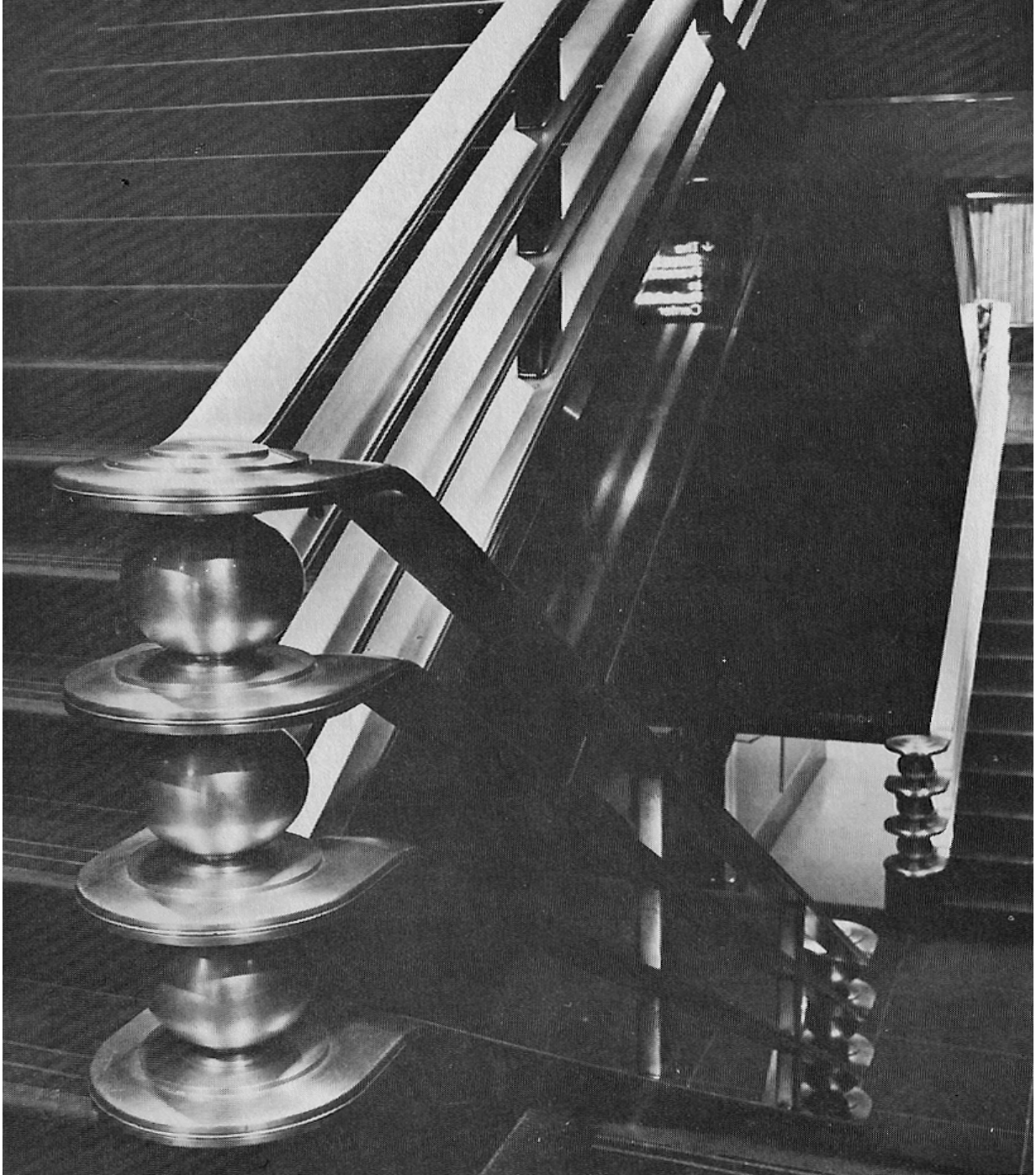
(Left) View of Radio City New York Master Control [Courtesy of Smithsonian Institution]



(Above) Prometheus fountain [RCAT fig 323]

(Right) NBC letters above main network studio entrance [RCAT fig 108]





Staircase railing [RCAT fig 109]



RCA Building main lobby [RCAT fig 97]



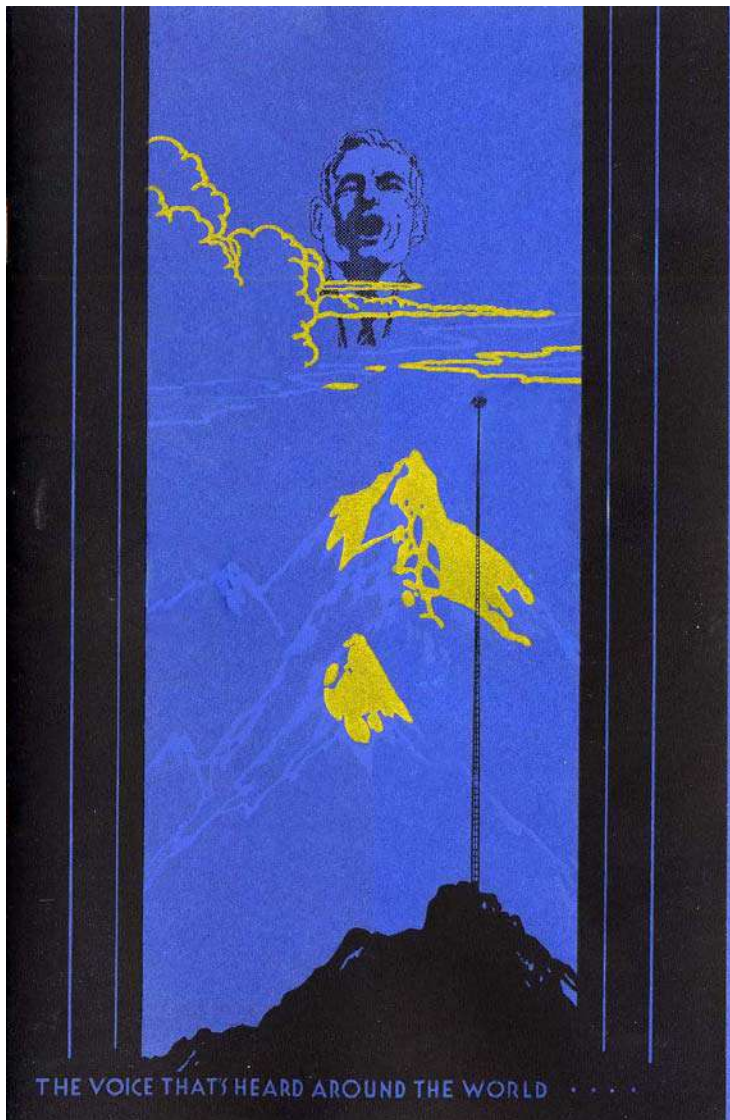
View of W. 50th Street from RCA Building [RCAT]



*(Above) NBC main entrance at night [NBC/NBCU
NUP_141759_0001.jpg]*

Denver

Radio City

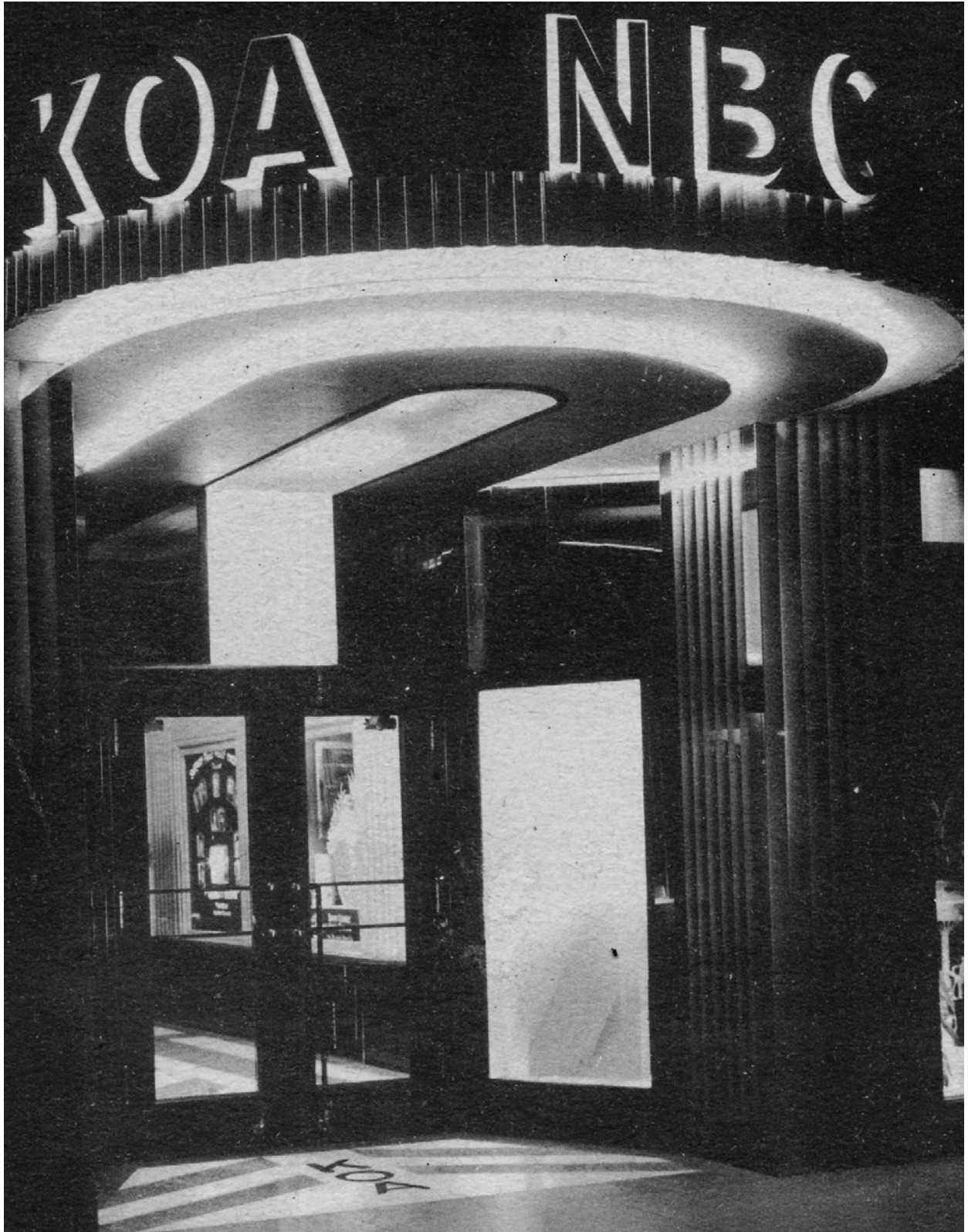


*Denver Radio City
Cover, Opening Night Program
December 15, 1934 [Ronald Kramer
collection]*



*Radio City Denver—Exterior View
Opening Night*

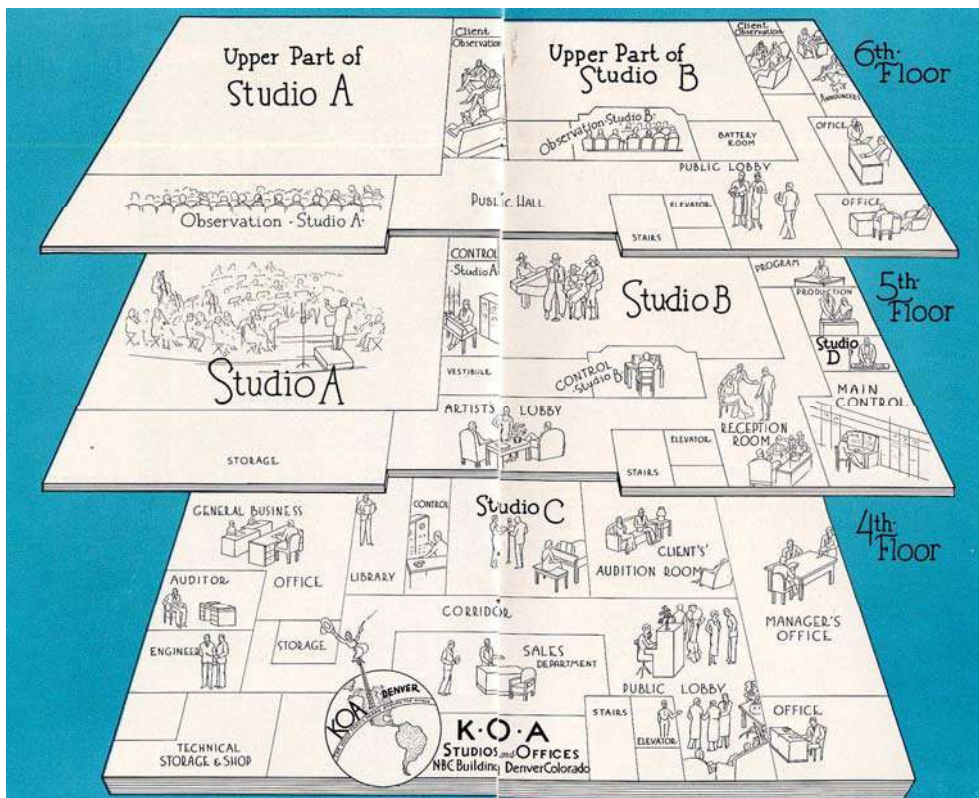
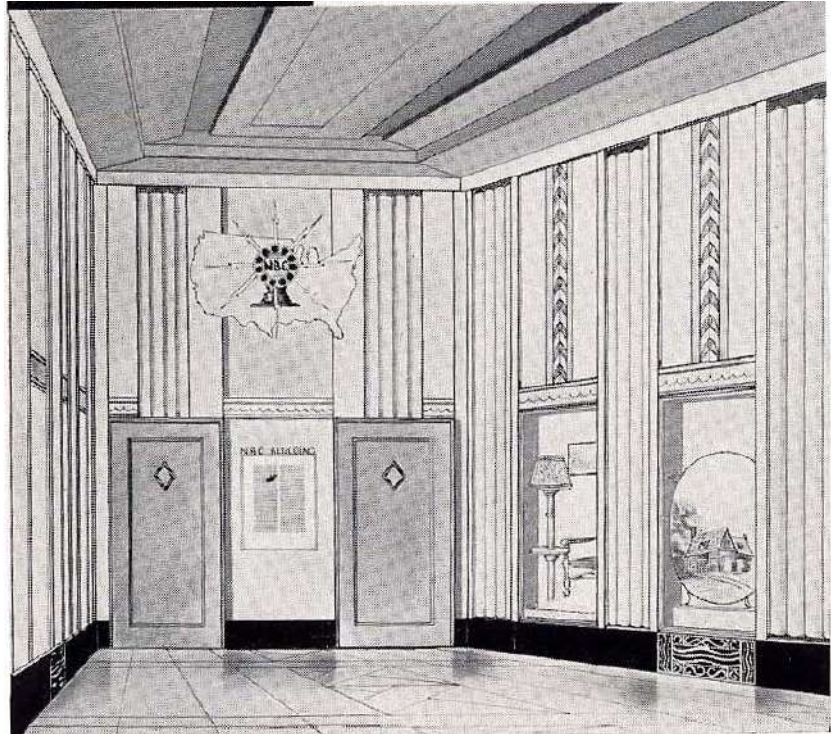
[Ronald Kramer collection]



Main Entrance [Ronald Kramer collection]

First floor lobby
 Illustration, Opening Night Program

[Ronald Kramer collection]



Building Floor Plan from Opening Night Program [Collection of Ronald Kramer]

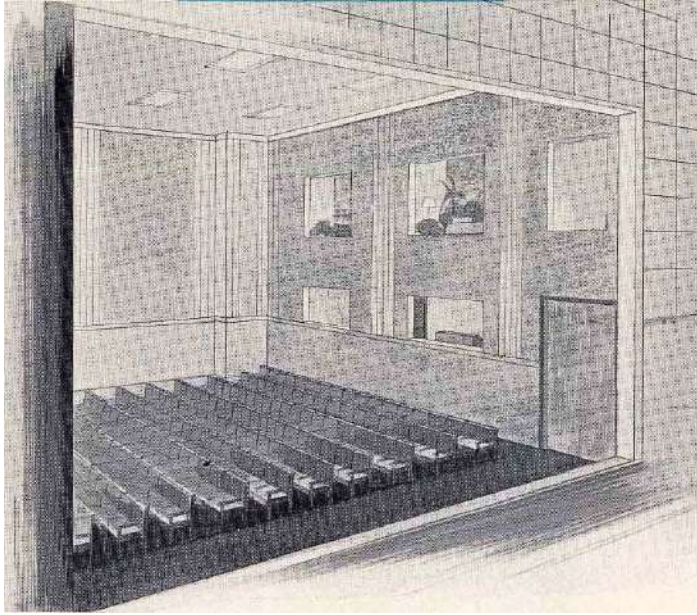


Main Reception area—fourth floor.

[Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection]



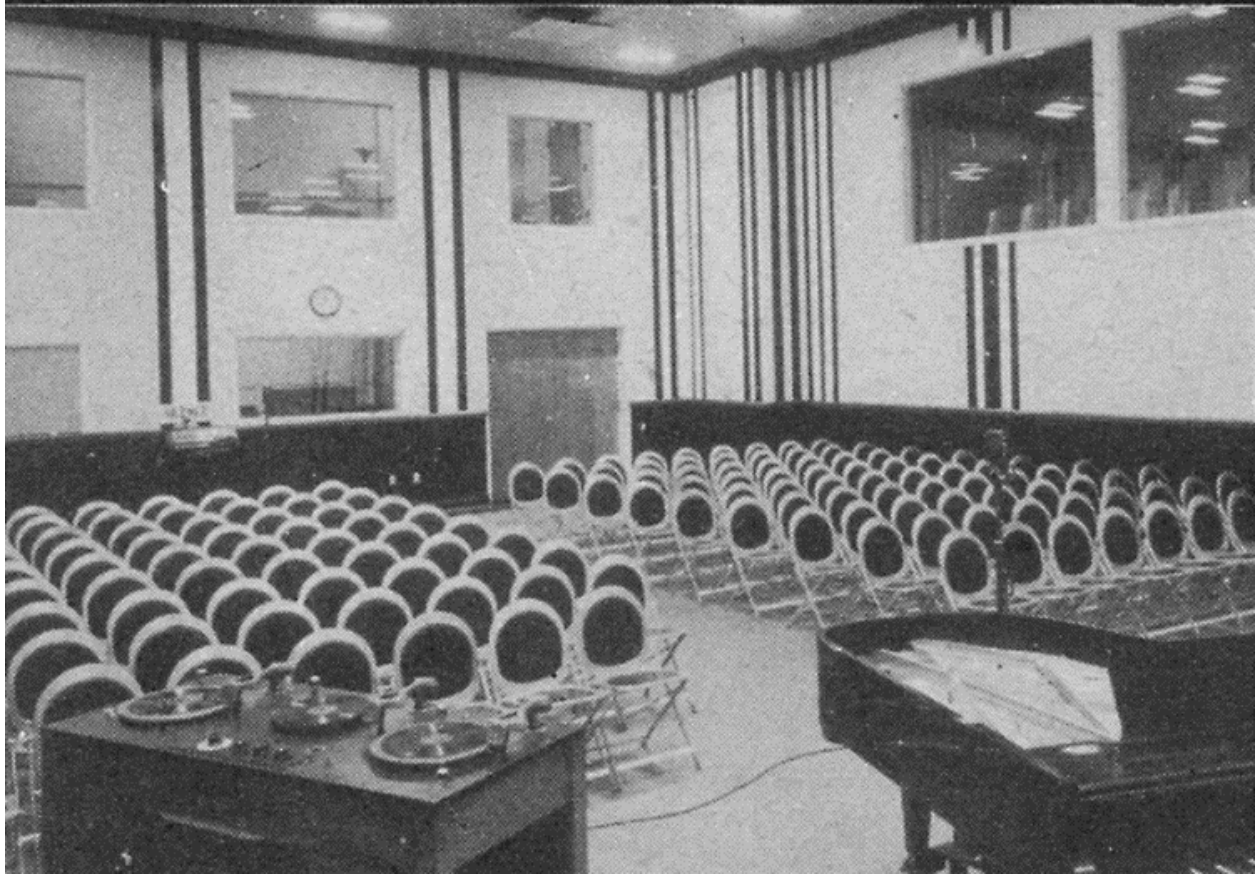
Studio A - Fifth floor [Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection]



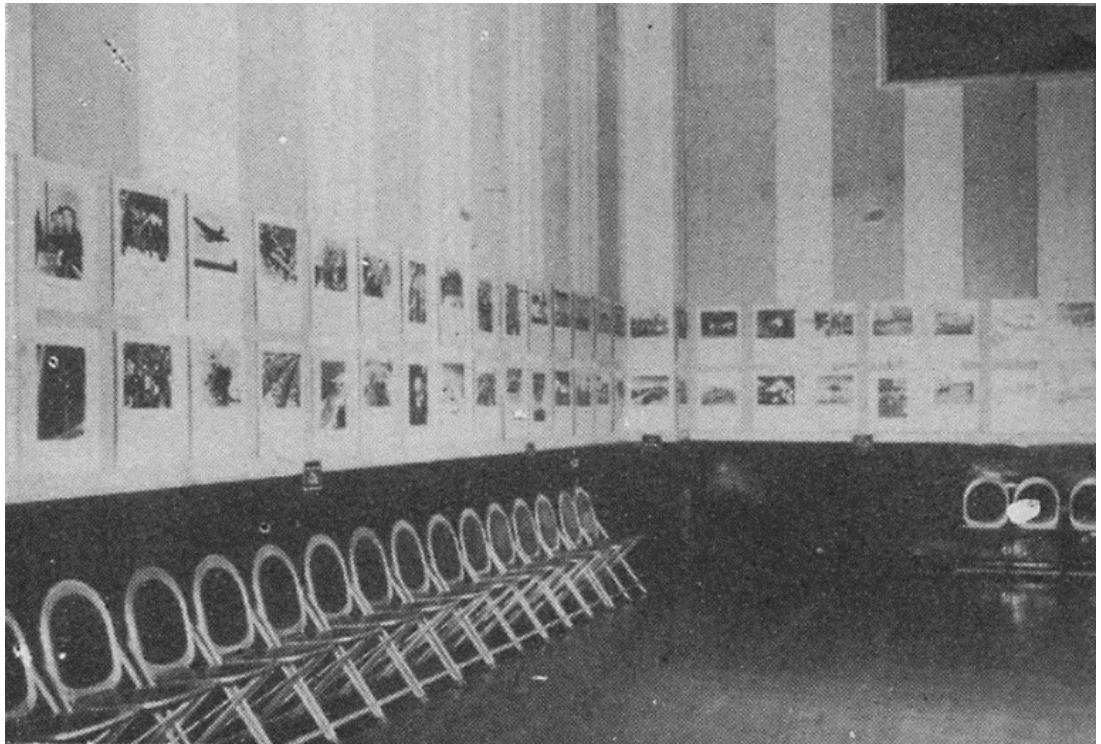
Studio C, fourth floor —Audition studio, illustration. Opening Night program [Ronald Kramer collection]



Studio C—fourth floor [Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection]



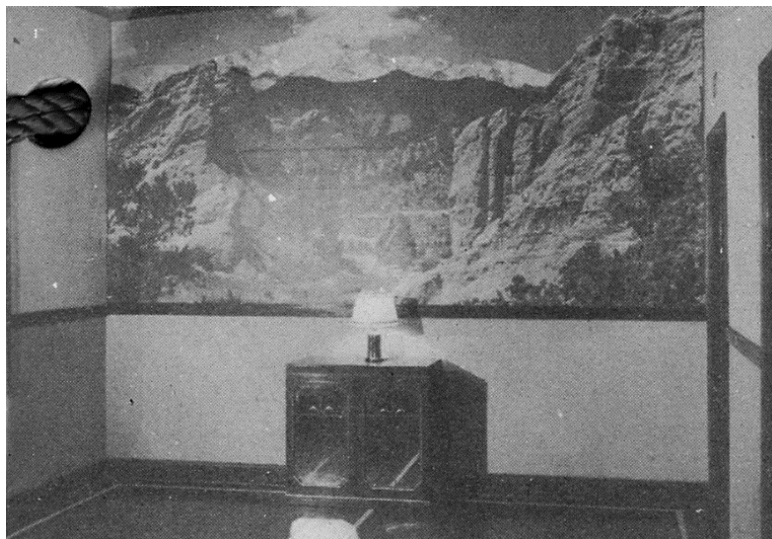
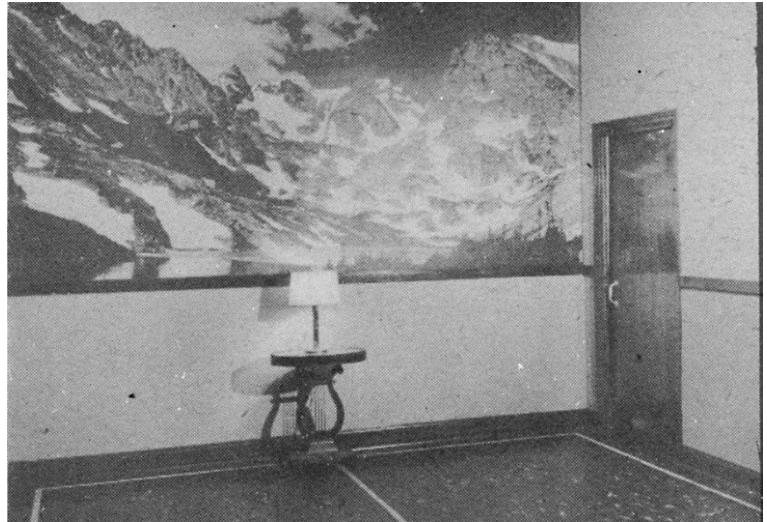
*(Above) Studio A - fifth floor
[Below] Studio B—fifth floor [Collection of Ronald Kramer]*





*Three views of Fifth Floor lobby near
Studio D*

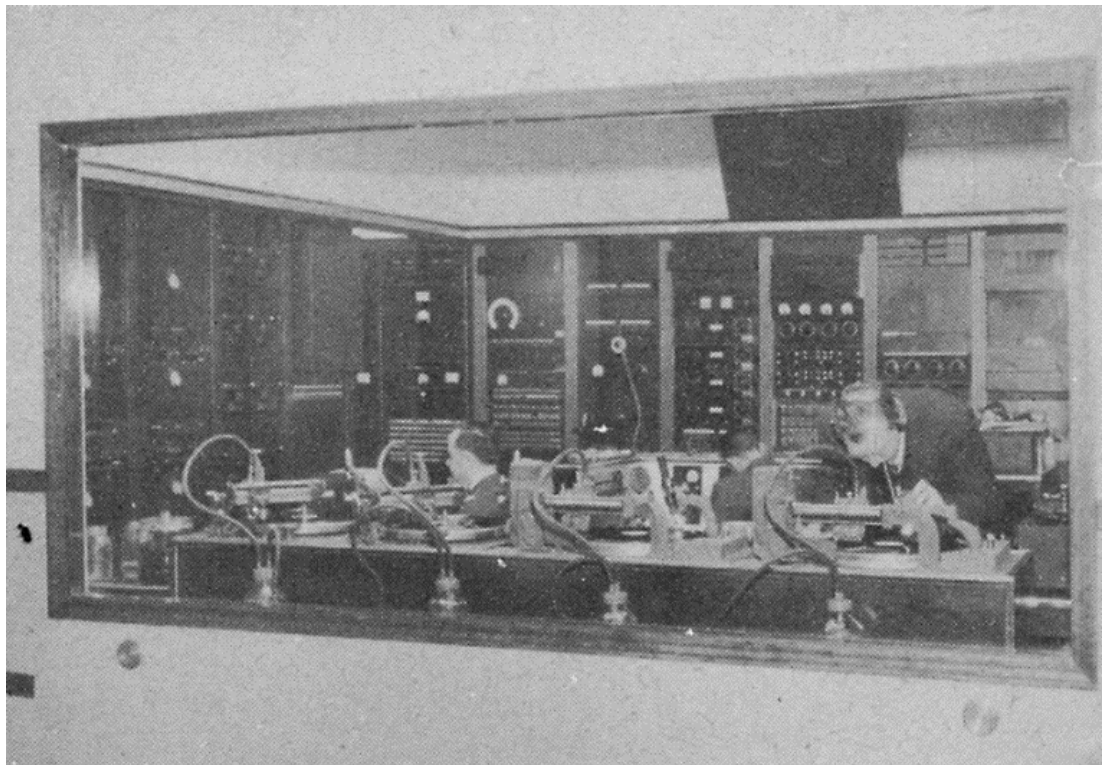
[Ronald Kramer collection]





(Above) Clients booth above Studio A; (Below) View into Master Control—fifth floor.

[Collection of Ronald Kramer]





[Left] Radio City Denver (also later known as the Wells Music Building) exterior

[Below] Radio City Denver — Opening Night, December 15, 1934. [Courtesy Denver Public Library Western History Collection]





Hollywood

Radio City

[Above] Tour brochure

[Right] postcard

[Ronald Kramer collection]





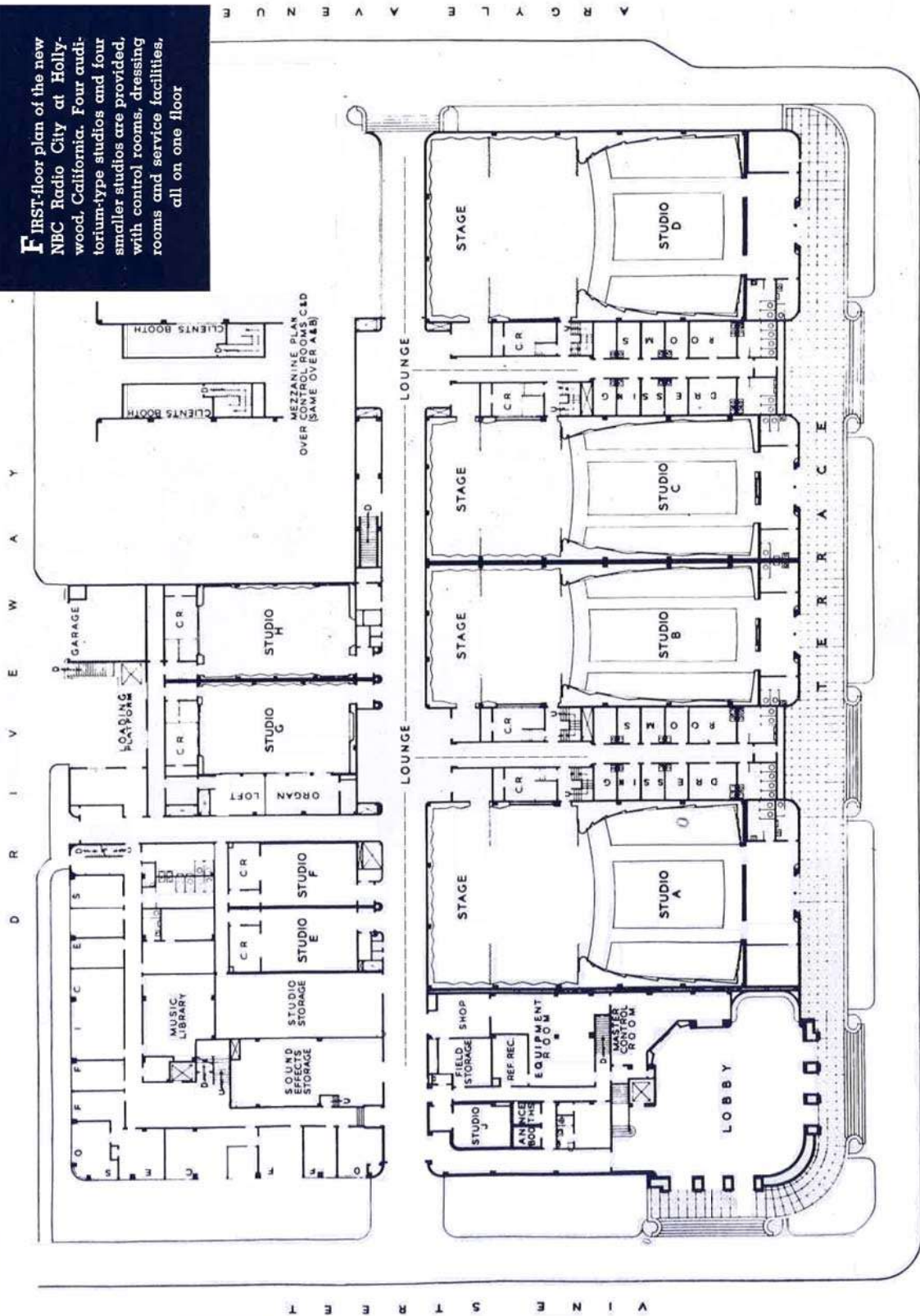
(Left) [Courtesy of Flickr photo sharing]

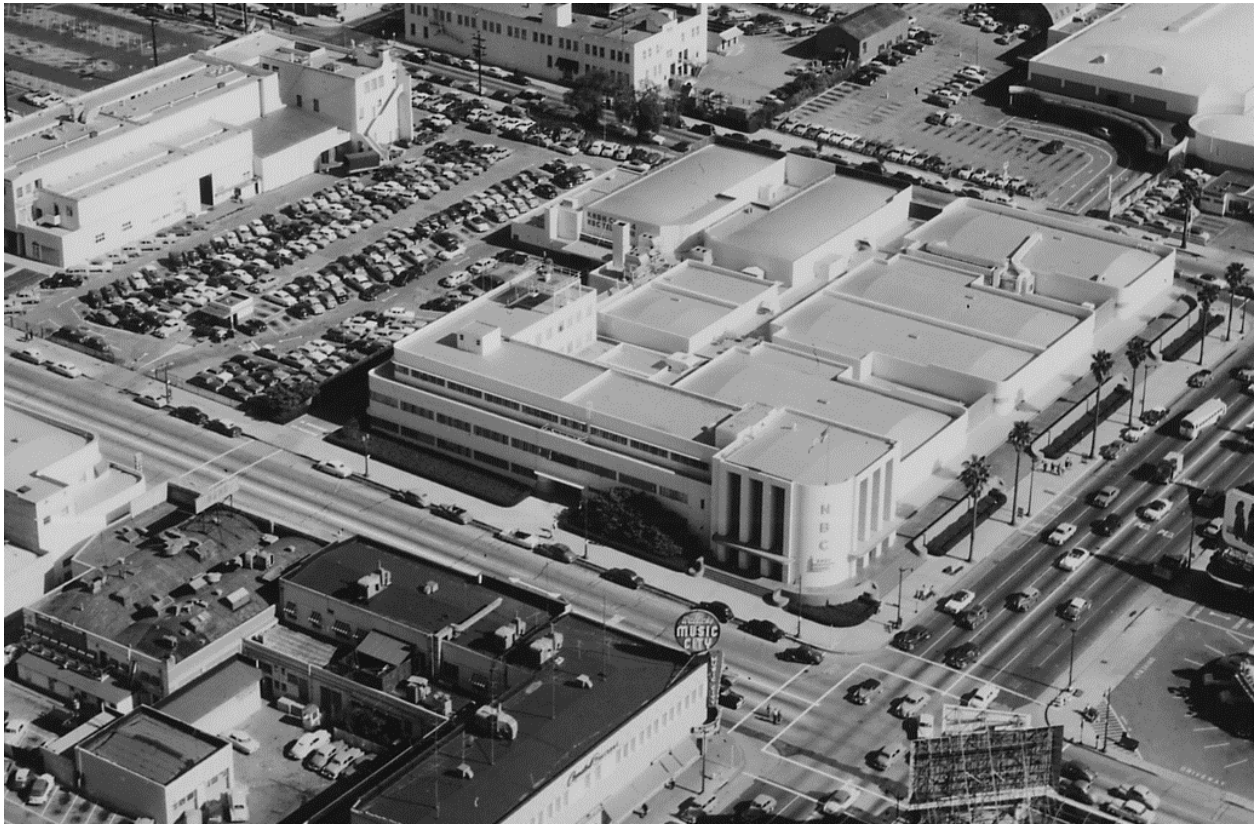
(Below) Exterior view of exit staircase from Studios C and D.

[Ronald Kramer collection]



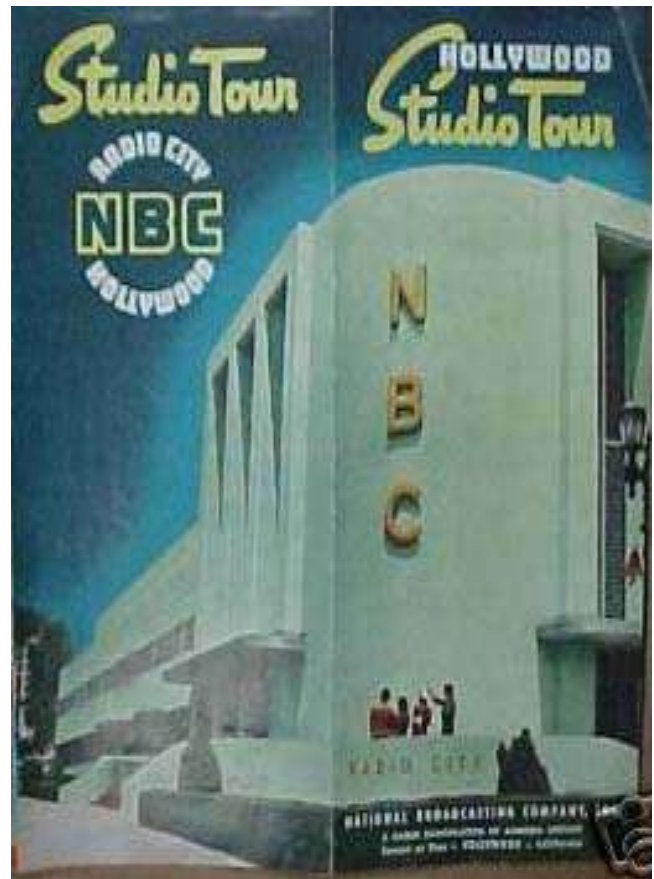
FIRST-floor plan of the new NBC Radio City at Hollywood, California. Four auditorium-type studios and four smaller studios are provided, with control rooms, dressing rooms and service facilities, all on one floor.





(Above) Aerial view, which includes the addition to Radio City Hollywood for KNBH-TV's studios, which were constructed in 1948 in the two rectangular structures — shown with the arrow — at the top rear of the main structure. NBC moved KNBH-TV and its TV network facilities from Radio City Hollywood to the newly-constructed NBC Color City, in Burbank, in March, 1955. [NBC Hollywood Property Inventory, 1953, Ronald Kramer collection]

(Right) Studio tour brochure [Ronald Kramer collection]





View of main entrance showing corporate logo. [Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00032789] also NBC Listen, February 1939

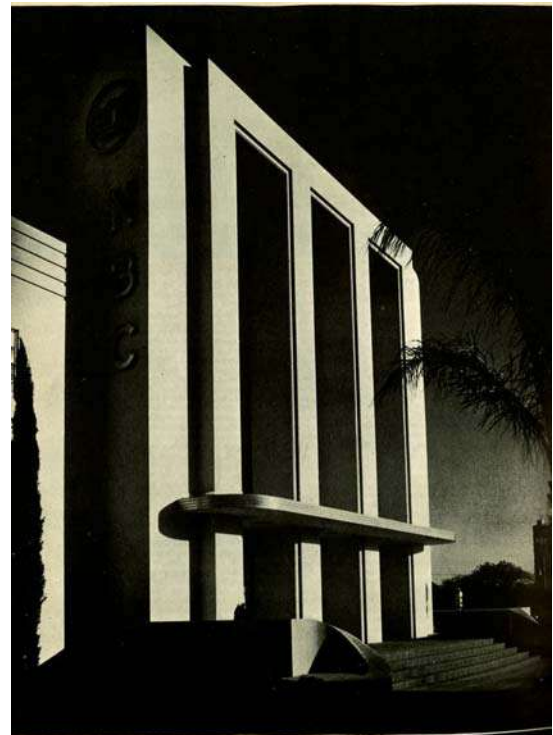
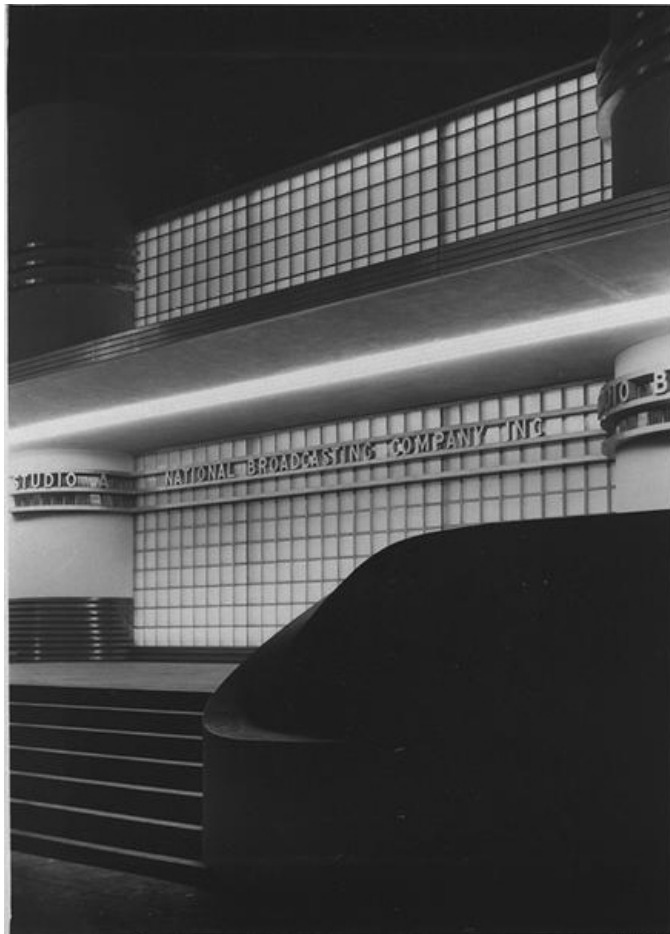


(Above) Staircase at night [Architectural Concrete "A Radio City for Hollywood," Vol. 5, No. 2]

(below left) façade

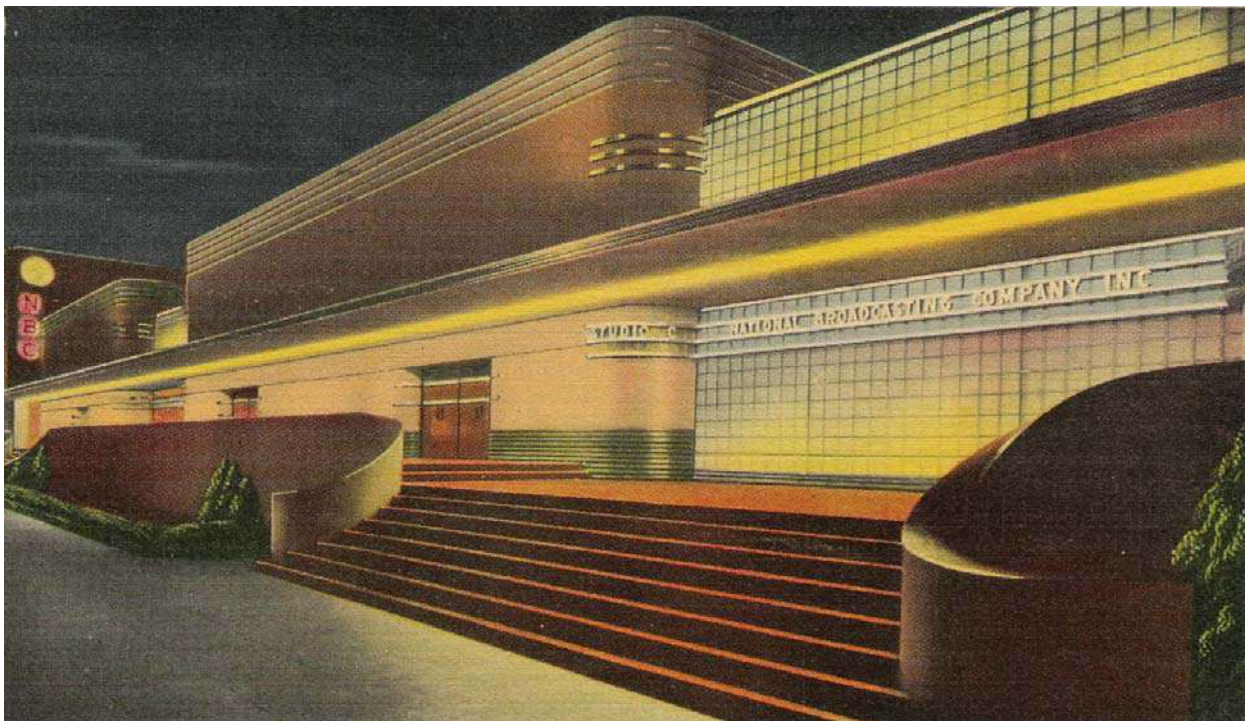
(Below right) Vine Street entrance

[Architectural Concrete, Vol. 5, No. 2]





*Exterior seen from Argyle Street [Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012874]
Bottom) Studios A and B exit staircase at night, postcard.
[Ronald Kramer collection]*



(Right) Courtesy of Huntington Library]

(Below) View from Vine Street. 1941. [Ronald Kramer collection]





*(Left) Main lobby interior facing west toward Sunset Blvd.
[Architectural Forum, March, 1939]*

(Below) Broadcast master control booth with “invisible glass” window on lobby southeast wall [Courtesy of Huntington Library image photCL_MLP_0045_042]





(Above) Main Lobby mural, 1938, "The Spirit of Radio" by Edward Trumble, a Connecticut artist whose most famous surviving mural is the New York Chrysler Building's massive "Energy, Result, Workmanship and Transportation." This Radio City Hollywood mural stood atop the building's master control room, through which the public could observe through the invisible glass window, on the lobby's southeast wall..

(Right) Main lobby staircase and elevator, 1939. [Courtesy of Huntington Library, photCL_MLP_0045_037]





(Above) Main entry lighted at night seen from Sunset Blvd.



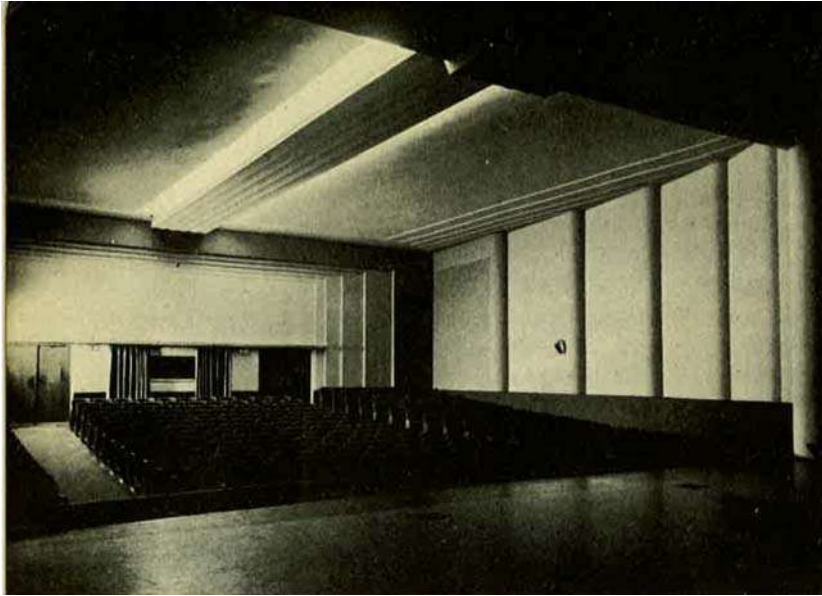
(Above Right) Studio D stage seen from audience [NBC Air Castles, Courtesy of Mike Henry]



(Center) Another view of Studio D looking toward audience [Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012860]

*(Below) Studio A
[Courtesy Early Hollywood by Arcadia Publishing]*





*(Left) Studio B seen from stage
[NBC Hollywood Studios, Cour-
tesy of Mike Henry]*

*(below) Corridor [NBC Air Cas-
tles, Courtesy of Mike Henry]*

*(Bottom) Corridor leading
to studios , over 50 feet in
length, indirect ceiling lighting
and floor covered with rubber-
ized material for sound deaden-
ing, 1939. [Courtesy of Los An-
geles Public Library 00012880]*





(Above left) Artists Lounge

(Above right) Executive office

(Left) Control room

[Collection of Ronald Kramer]

*(Below Control Room 1938
[Los Angeles Public Library])*





(Above) Radio City at night. [Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012878]

(Below) Sunset and Vine, at night [Hollywood, Land of Legend, p. 177]





[Above] Radio City view Sunset Street view from Argyle Street corner. [Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012873]

[Below] Close-up of doors, Sunset Boulevard side, photo from Maynard Parker photo, Huntington Hartford library]





(Above) Radio City from corner of Sunset and Vine.

*[NBC Inventory of West Coast properties, 1954,
Ronald Kramer collection]*





(Left) Main entrance, Sunset and Vine corner, after arrival of KNBH television. [Courtesy of University of Southern California, digital library image]

(Bottom) Main entrance, Sunset and Vine corner, when NBC's owned-and-operated Los Angeles TV station had call letters KRCA, 1958. [Courtesy Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00012993]

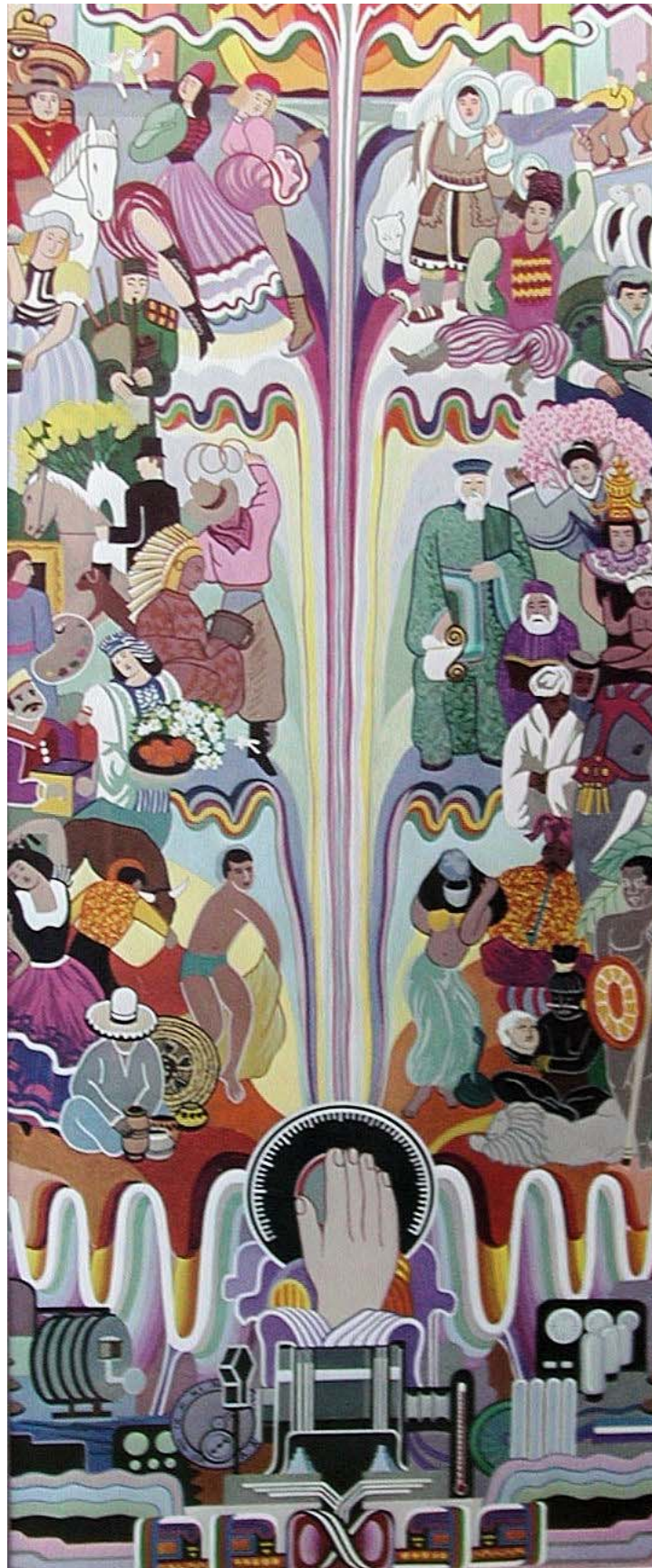


San Francisco

Radio City



Postcard [Ronald Kramer collection]



*Exterior mural designed by
C. J. Fitzgerald*

*[Lithograph in Ronald Kra-
mer collection]*



(Left) Main entrance of Radio City. [Courtesy John Schneider]

*(Below) Main lobby
Courtesy Barry Mishkind*





Main Lobby

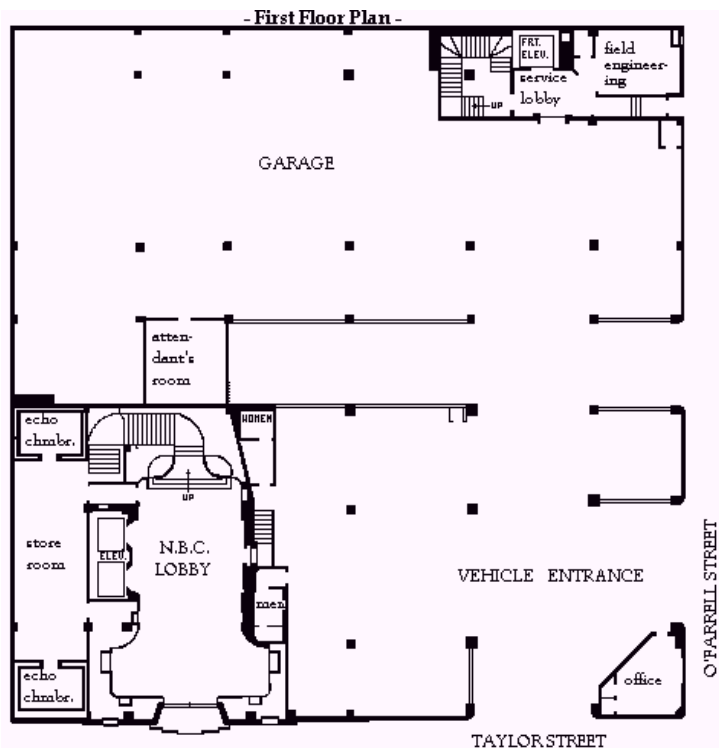
[Courtesy Barry Mishkind]

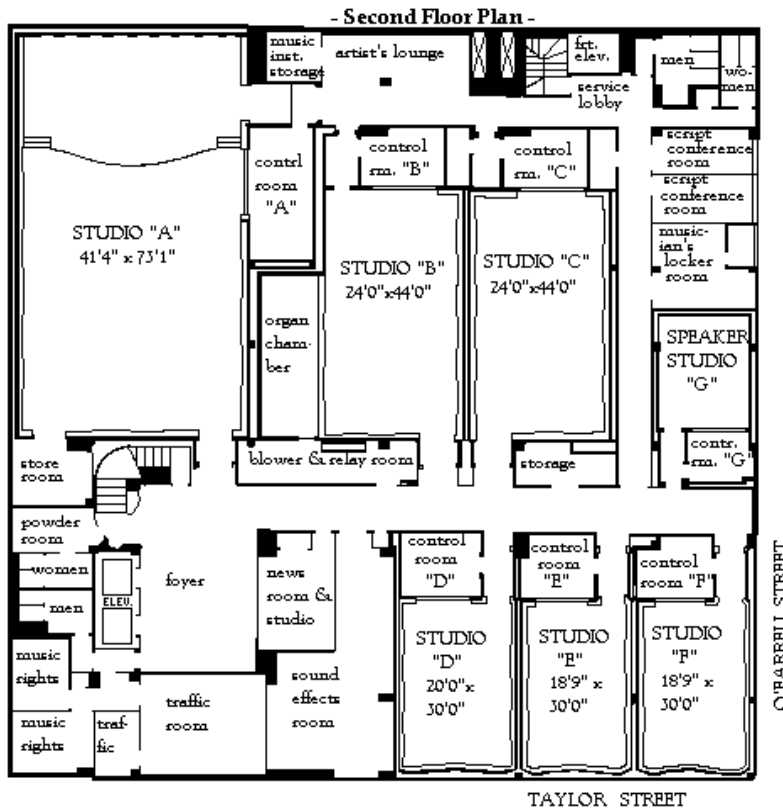


(above) Staircase at main lobby rear .

(below) First Floor Plan

[Architectural Record, November 1942]





(Above) Studio A
[Courtesy John Schneider]

(Left) Second Floor Plan
[Architectural Record, November 1942]



*[Above] Organ Baffle [Architectural Record, November, 1942]
[Below] Organist playing in Studio B [Courtesy of John
Schneider, oldradiohistorian]*







*[Above Left] Control room for studio A
[Above Right] Control Room for B or C
[Courtesy of John Schneider, the oldradiohistorian]*

*(Below) View into news wire service room.
[Courtesy of Huntington Hartford Library].*





(Above left) Studio A

(Above right) Studio C. Studio B was nearly identical.

(Right) Studio D. Studios E and F were the same size and nearly identical.

[Courtesy Barry Mishkind]

[Right] Program in Studio D. Studios D, E and F were the same size and nearly identical.

[Courtesy of John Schneider, oldradiohistorian]

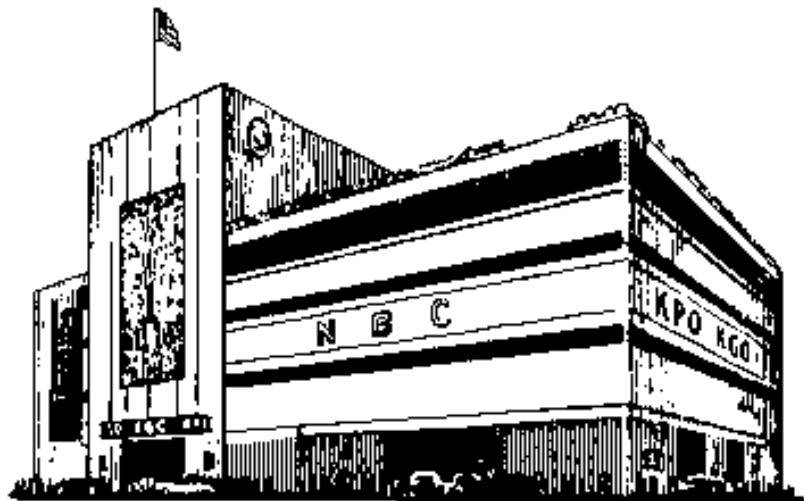






[Above] Studio G which was designed with an informal atmosphere resembling a typical living room. [Courtesy John Schneider, oldradiohiostiran]

(Below) Artists sketch of façade.



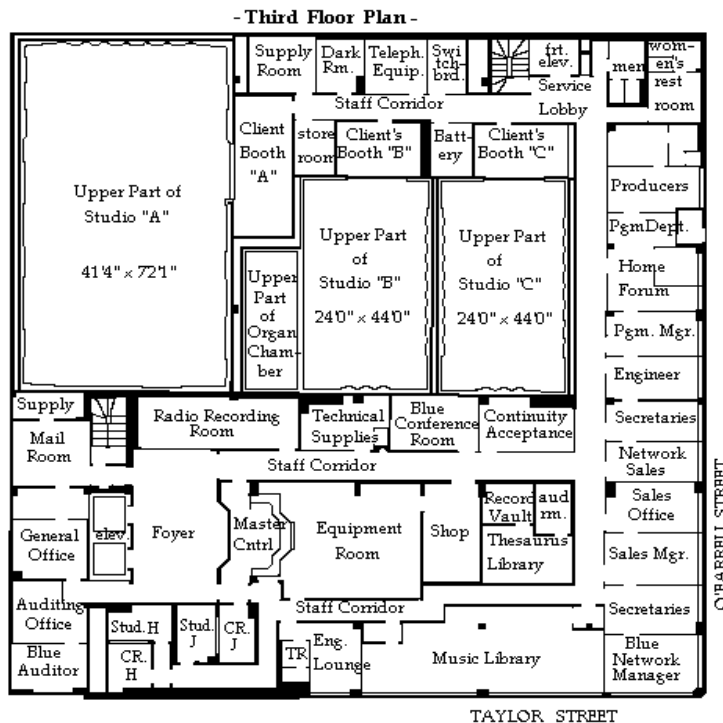


[Above] Third floor Blue Network (and KGO) lobby with Recording Room in left rear.

[Right] Recording Room looking into Blue Network lobby.
[Courtesy of John Schneider, oldradiohistorian]



[Below] Third Floor plan [Architectural Record, November 1942]



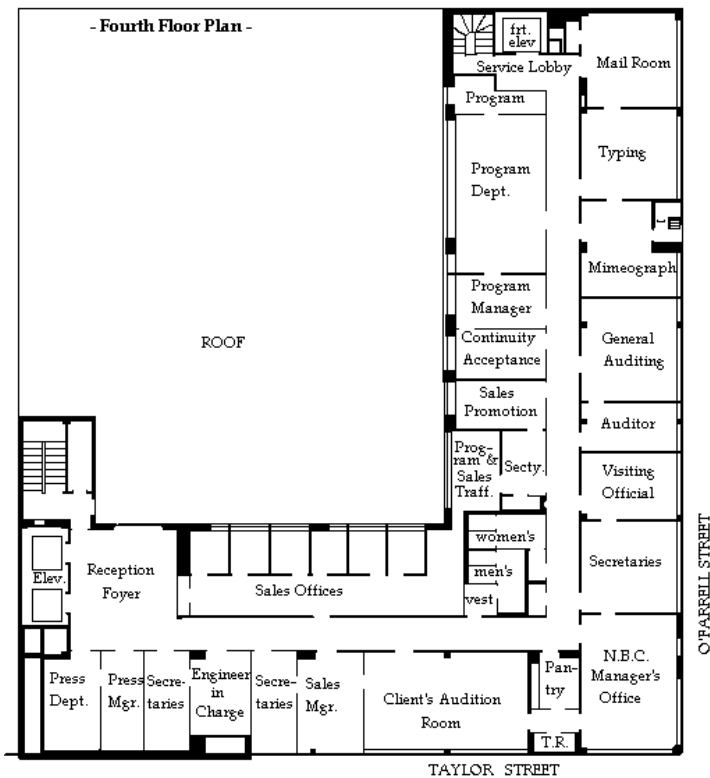
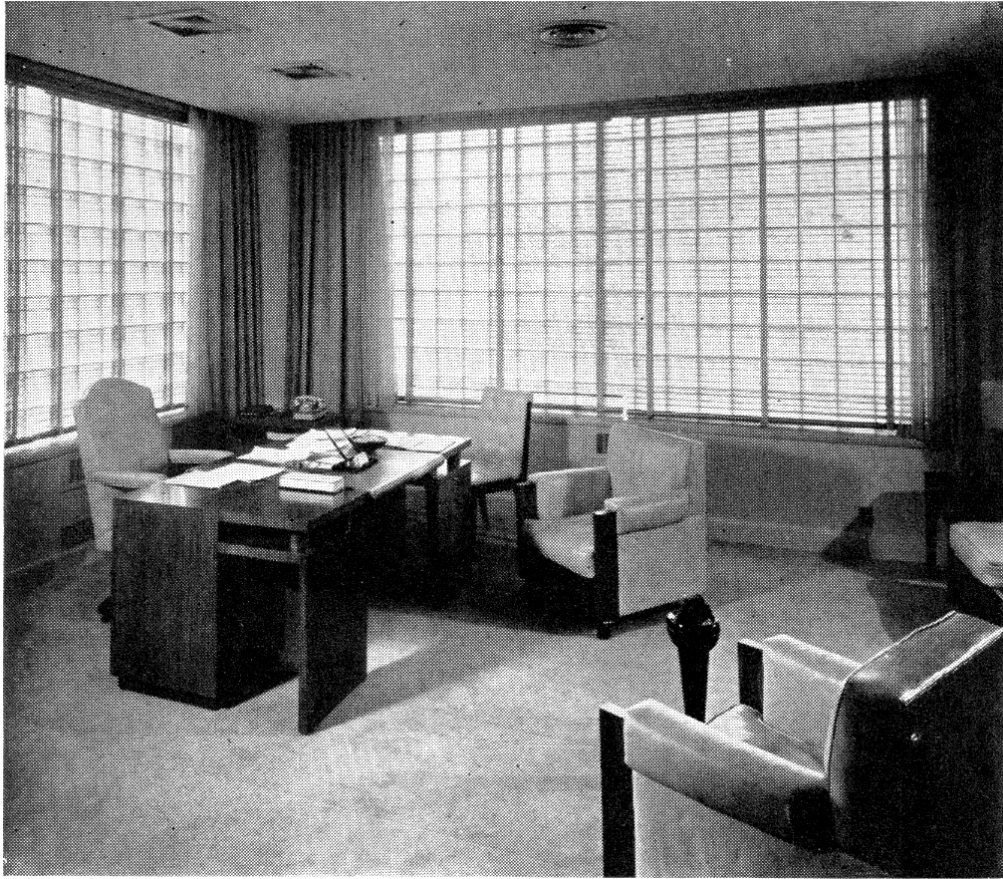


[Above] Studio A clients booth. [Courtesy of John Schneider, oldradiohistorian]

*(Below) Clients booth
[Courtesy of Huntington Hartford Library].*







*[Architectural Record
November, 1942*



Chicago

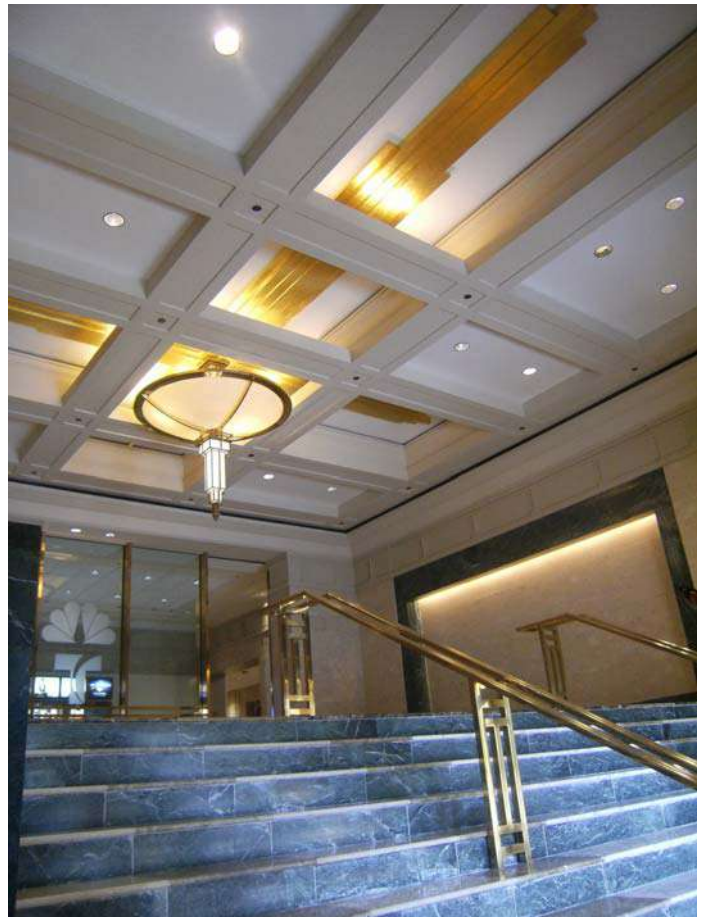
NBC Tower



Photo courtesy of A. C. Miller Photography



Two views of the NBC Tower, Chicago, constructed in 1999. [Architecture Today, Flickr]





*NBC logo lighted at night atop Radio City Hollywood main entrance facing Sunset Blvd.
[Los Angeles Public Library, LAPL00032789] also NBC Listen, February 1939*